Eunuchs & Sacred Boundaries *in* Islamic Society

Shaun Marmon

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Shaun Marmon

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OTHER VOLUMES ARE IN PREPARATION

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PREFACE

This book explores an important aspect of mediation in premodern Islamic society—the mediation of eunuchs, a category of nongendered individuals who both defined and crossed highly charged boundaries of moral and physical space in the world of the living and in the world of the dead.

The sacred society of eunuchs, established at the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad in Madina at some time in the mid-twelfth century, forms the subject of much of this study. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, under the patronage of the Mamluk sultans of Egypt, the "eunuchs of the Prophet" emerged as a powerful and wealthy organization, guardians and mediators of the *baraka,* the charismatic force that infused the Prophet's tomb and the surrounding sanctuary. Similar eunuch societies appeared at the tombs of sultans in Cairo, at the Kaʾba in Mecca, at the Dome of the Rock of Jerusalem, and at the tomb of Abraham in Hebron. The societies of Madina and Mecca have endured as active organizations well into modern times. In 1990 there were seventeen eunuchs serving in the sanctuary of Madina and fourteen serving in Mecca.

This book is not a chronological study of the eunuchs of Madina, nor is it a social history of eunuchs as people of slave origin. Rather, I have chosen to focus on the representation of eunuchs in the context of the sacred. In my text the eunuch serves as a guide in exploring certain aspects of Islamic ritual, the symbolics of power, and the construction of categories of gender and time.

The two geographic poles of the book are Cairo and Madina. Because the Mamluk period witnessed the emergence and articulation of the society as a powerful cultic group, three of the five chapters of this work focus primarily on Mamluk sources. The concerns of household, palace, and tomb in Mamluk Cairo are vital to understanding the eunuchs

of the Prophet. Similarly, the struggles between Shiʿi and Sunni factions in Madina during the Mamluk period inform the enduring image of the holy eunuch constructed by Sunni authors in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In these chapters I have attempted to place these holy eunuchs in the context of the religious and political concerns of the Mamluk Empire. But the Mamluk Empire fell in 1517 and the eunuchs of the Prophet endured. I have thus ventured in my final chapters to examine early modern and modern representations of this society.

The material I have used for this study consists of a broad range of medieval Arabic sources of various genres as well as Mamluk deeds of *waqf* (pious foundation) from the surviving archives in Cairo. These documents are drawn from two collections: the collections of the Ministry of Waqfs (*Wizārat al-Awqāf*) and that of the National Archives (*Dār al-Wathāʾiq*). For the early modern and modern periods, I have made extensive use of Arabic pilgrimage narratives, topographical works on Madina, and the accounts of European travelers.

These European observers are all, in some sense, outsiders. But all observers of the eunuchs, medieval and modern, Muslim and non-Muslim, were outside the category of eunuch. Many Muslim authors endow the eunuchs of my story with a voice, but it is one informed by a long tradition of hagiography. The eunuchs themselves maintain a dignified silence. In consequence, this work is as much about the observers as it is about the observed.

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I am grateful to David Ayalon for his kind encouragement. His own work on eunuchs in medieval Islamic military and political culture should be required reading for anyone interested in the role of eunuchs in premodern societies.

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EUNUCHS AND SACRED BOUNDARIES IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY

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1

Cairo: Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries

Eunuchs and the Vestibule: A Poet's Model

When the young Turkish freedman ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Ghuzūlī, aspiring poet and frequenter of the literary circles of fourteenth-century Cairo and Damascus, composed his sole contribution to the field of medieval Arabic belles lettres, the *Kitāb maṭāliʿ al-budūr fī manāzil al-surūr,* or Book of the Risings of the Full Moons on the Dwellings of Joy, he chose an unusual structure in which to display his mastery of the genre: he built a house.[1] The resulting work, as its florid title vaguely suggests, is an anthology of verses, anecdotes, and proverbs on the subject of the ideal home, arranged by chapters (*abwāb,* or "doors") that correspond, more or less, to the physical layout of an affluent household.[2] This self-conscious combining of a literary plan with an architectural one makes al-Ghuzūlī's book much more than the usual showpiece of what had become, for medieval Arabic authors, a highly mannered and formulaic genre. Al-Ghuzūlī's text is a poetic map of domestic space.

The author takes the reader by the hand, as it were, and leads him through the various sections of the home, beginning in the public world of the street, outside the household gate, and gradually penetrating the private world of the household interior. The first five chapters are devoted to the choice of a building site for a home, to the rules governing its correct architectural dimensions, to the selection of good neighbors and forbearance in the face of bad ones, to the main door or portal, and to the "condemnation of doorkeepers." The sixth chapter has what

to the modern reader is the somewhat provocative title "On Eunuchs and the Vestibule."[3]

Al-Ghuzūlī chose to place his eunuchs not in the inner sanctum of the household with the women, the *ḥarīm,* but in the *dihlīz,* the vestibule or covered hallway "which is between the door and the [actual] dwelling,"[4] the physical area of the house that was, in a very real sense, the corridor between public and private. Al-Ghuzūlī never describes the exterior of his dwelling of joy. It was not the actual facade (*wājihat al-dār*) but the *dihlīz* that was the true "countenance" (*wajh,* lit. "face") of the house. The door or portal, the main entryway, was only the initial, exterior point of access.

The doorkeepers or guards who stood outside the house at this main entryway (the *bāb,* "door") or who sat on stone benches in the recessed portals of great dwellings were a constant reminder to the outside world that crossing through this first exterior boundary was just the beginning of what was meant to be a difficult passage. The "condemnation of doorkeepers" was a common literary topos—so notorious were these outer guards, especially those who stood in front of the homes of the rich, for arbitrarily turning petitioners away.[5]

The nonmember of the household who was permitted to pass through this first, exterior barrier, would enter not the household proper but the vestibule, or *dihlīz,* the area that defined the actual beginning of the house but in which the visitor was still held in a kind of safety zone. For al-Ghuzūlī the importance of the vestibule as both a functional room and the moral and physical boundary of the household is evident in this passage:

> Yaḥyā ibn Khālid has said, "It is incumbent on a person to concern himself with his *dihlīz,* for the *dihlīz* is the countenance of the household and the resting place of the guest. It is the sitting room for the close friend until he receives permission [to enter] and the place for the craftsman. It is the place where the eunuchs sit at ease, and it is the furthest limit of the boundary for one who asks permission [to enter].[6]

The actual front of the house—the surface that faced the public, outside world—was much less important. European travelers to the Mamluk domains frequently commented on what was, to their eyes, the strange contradiction of urban dwellings whose shoddy, seemingly neglected exteriors gave way to elegant, carefully ornamented interiors. The vestibule, the beginning of this interior space, was often decorated with inlaid pavement and mosaics, the "exquisite little marble stones of

all colors mixed together and worked with fine histories and flowers" which so impressed the German pilgrim Arnold von Harff during his visit to Cairo in 1497. Symon Simeonis, who traveled through Cairo in 1323, compared the street views of the houses, built of "bricks and mud," unfavorably to those of Paris. But speaking in the voice of the biblical Jacob on awakening from his celestial vision, Symon recalled the interior of these same Cairene houses as having appeared to him "to be none other than 'the house of God and the gate of heaven'."[7]

The main doorways of the homes of the wealthy, surmounted by the blazons of powerful amirs, confronted the street with a distinct architectural grandeur. In modern Cairo the ruins of these arched stone portals, now the boundaries not of great households but of rubble and emptiness, still overshadow the passerby with a kind of dilapidated arrogance.[8] In al-Ghuzūlī's text, however, it is not these great portals but the vestibules behind their massive doors that are the real loci of what one might call a ceremony of access. Some of those who seek permission to enter, such as the craftsman, might never go beyond this space, while others, such as the close friend, may cross over into certain areas of the household interior. All, however, are required to stop in the vestibule and await the permission (*idhn*) of the master of the house.

Why did al-Ghuzūlī place the eunuchs in this particular space in the architectural plan of his household? The other slaves of his metaphorical home, male and female, appear some twenty-eight chapters later, after the reader has long since entered the recesses of the domestic interior. Here, in the private inner world of the household, near the women, both free and slave, one would expect to find the eunuchs.[9] Many wealthy Mamluk households, as al-Ghuzūlī would have known, employed a eunuch *zimām,* the supervisor, guard, and intermediary for the women of the *ḥarīm.* The duties of this domestic official were outlined by the pious judge Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, al-Ghuzūlī's near-contemporary:

> Among the eunuchs is the *zimām.* He is the one who is concerned with women. It is his duty and his right to cast his eyes upon their affairs and to advise the master of the house [concerning them]. He must inform him [the master] of any suspicion which he himself is unable to clear, and he must prevent agents of debauchery such as old women and others from gaining access to the women [of the household].[10]

Such eunuchs were not only the guardians of the *ḥarīm,* themselves physical symbols, like the veil, of the ideals of domestic seclusion; they were also neutral emissaries in a moral universe highly charged with

sexual tension, a universe in which the forces of *fitna,* a word that signifies sexual temptation as well as political discord and civil strife, were seen as an omnipresent threat to the social and moral order.[11]

The word *ḥarīm*—which often denotes the women of the household irrespective of whether they are actually inside the sanctuary of the house or outside its walls but within the "sanctuary" of the veil—comes from the root *ḥ*r*m,* meaning "sacred," "inviolable," "forbidden," a word that, with all its derivations, was and continues to be one of the most powerful and ambiguous in the Arabic language. In the cultural vocabulary of the medieval Muslim it was a word loaded with moral, legal, social, and political implications.

A religious sanctuary, where no blood can be shed, such as the holy cities of Mecca and Madina, is a *ḥaram.* A *muḥtaram* person is one who is honored and venerated; *iḥtirām* or *ḥurma* is the quality that inspires respect, honor, and dread. The veneration, the sacred honor, due to the ruler is *ḥurmat al-ṣulṭān.* At the same time, the worst transgressions a human being can commit, the acts that are forbidden under the sacred law, are referred to as *ḥarām.* Food that is unclean is *ḥarām.* The thief who, by his theft, has broken one of God's boundaries (*ḥudūd allāh*), is termed *ḥarāmī.* In the context of sexual morality, the adult male, other than a husband, who is allowed to see a woman unveiled, to cross the boundaries of the *ḥarīm,* is one who is paradoxically referred to as *maḥram,* "forbidden," because he is, by virtue of consanguinity, "forbidden" sexually and thus "permitted" morally and spatially.[12]

In this context al-Ghuzūlī's placement of the eunuchs in the vestibule, the architectural and literary space that serves as the corridor of access to his house of words, makes a great deal of sense. Although women might occupy a separate domestic space within the household, especially the wealthy household, the entire home was, in a sense, *ḥarīm,* that is, "sacred," "forbidden." The word *ḥarīm* as an architectural term was never gendered by Mamluk lexicographers as "women's quarters" but was defined inclusively as "the *ḥarīm* of a dwelling: the interior [of the dwelling] once its door has been closed."[13]

In the hundreds of descriptions of actual Cairene dwellings which survive in Mamluk endowment deeds, anonymous scribes, whose focus is not poetry but the value of real estate, also grasp the reader's hand and walk, or at times rush, us through structures reconstructed in prose. Like al-Ghuzūlī they sometimes use the term *dihlīz* for the vestibule of a dwelling, but they also use another term, *darkāh,* to designate this

space.[14] They reserve *dihlīz* for the angled corridors we must pass through after we have been allowed to leave the "in-between" area. These corridors are part of a complex arrangement of space which, in fact, enhances the symbolic power of the vestibule. Even once we leave the *dihlīz/darkāh,* we must negotiate hallways and staircases and various other transitional zones. This organization of space constantly reminds us that our presence in the household is by permission (*idhn*) and is controlled not only by invisible barriers of etiquette but also by concrete barriers of brick and stone.

In domestic terms, the *dihlīz* or *darkāḥ* was "the furthest limit of the boundary for the one who asks permission to enter" the true sacred boundary of the home. The very existence of the vestibule and the necessity, even for a close friend, of obtaining formal permission to go beyond this space served to emphasize the special quality of the entire home as a *ḥarīm.* In the homes of the wealthy and powerful, the presence of eunuchs added to the prestige and seclusion of this domestic sanctuary.

The frequent government confiscations of the households of wealthy officials were usually supervised by eunuch "police" drawn from the corps of eunuchs who served under the *muqaddam al-mamālīk,*[15] the eunuch commandant of the sultan's elite slave cadets. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Shādhilī, the student and hagiographer of the renowned Egyptian scholar al-Suyūṭī, tells the story of a Takrūrī (West African) eunuch, a freedman of al-Suyūṭī, who went to serve "at the gate of the [eunuch] *muqaddam*" (i.e., in the sultan's Citadel in Cairo) after his master's death and incurred the saintly shaykh's posthumous and fatal curse for his abuse of the rather broad authority granted to such eunuch police during confiscations.[16] If the victim of the confiscation was a person of status, one of the high-ranking Citadel eunuchs would attend to the matter personally, often imprisoning the official in question in his own home or in that of a eunuch colleague.[17]

Such confiscations usually included the seizure of women's jewelry and expensive clothes and the arrest of the wives, concubines, and children of the unfortunate official—tasks that may have been considered appropriate to eunuchs. More important, the very act of confiscation was a violation of the domestic sanctuary, an official decision to break through the boundaries of both the portal and the vestibule with no ceremony of access, no static period of waiting for permission to enter. Eunuchs were consistently associated with vestibule-like spaces

in a variety of architectural settings. Despite their frequent presentation as guardians of social and sexual order, they were paradoxically in their very persons the embodiment of social and sexual ambiguity. It is not surprising that the ambiguous, even morally perilous task of violating the vestibule, in the case of confiscations, should fall to eunuchs.

When al-Ghuzūlī, as a matter of course, placed his eunuchs in the *dihlīz* of his literary "dwelling of joy," he drew, perhaps unconsciously, upon a cultural blueprint of the household that served as the basis for most of the daily social interactions of his contemporaries. The rules of etiquette that dictated who could enter a household, the manner in which that person could enter, and how far he was allowed to penetrate into the interior were conscious social controls, the purpose of which was not only to underscore the authority of the master of the house but also, on a more profound level, to contain the possibilities of *fitna*, the moral and social disorder that always threatened human societies.

Great households might include more than one family as well as slaves, freed people, and other dependents. Even among members of the same household the possibility of *fitna* was present, and household space had to be negotiated constantly according to the gender, age, status (slave or free), and blood relationship of the individuals occupying that space.

The Muslim jurist Ibn Taymiyya, one of the most dramatic civilian figures in the urban society of the Mamluk Empire,[18] pointed out that God had ordained that women, unlike men, be "both protected and cordoned off," and that "veiling with clothing and houses [*al-istitār bi'l-libās wa'l-buyūt*]" be imposed on them because the "appearance of women [in public] is a cause of *fitna* and men are set over them."[19] All men and all women, no matter how pious, were subject to the passions that led to *fitna* and, as objects of desire, could themselves also be unwitting causes of *fitna*. Ibn Taymiyya, like other medieval Muslim jurists, argued that beautiful adolescent boys should also be removed from the public gaze of adult sexuality.[20]

Women generated a particular kind of anxiety in normative texts. They were defined as being by nature "deficient in reason and religion [*nāqiṣāt al-ʿaql wa'l-dīn*]." Unlike adolescent boys, who would grow into bearded men and leave behind the dangerous stage of prepubescent beauty, women were potential disruptors of sexual morality for most of their lives. Even the woman who was past childbearing and "no longer desired for marriage" and was thus not required to observe the same

mores of veiling and seclusion as younger women was, as Ibn Taymiyya's contemporary the jurist al-Subkī had cautioned, one of the possible "agents of debauchery" and a threat to male honor.[21] When Ibn Taymiyya quoted the Qur'anic verse that men were "responsible for women," the "supervisors of women," he was not only recalling to the reader's mind the Qur'anic dictum that sets men above women; he was also expressing the often repeated theme that men, as more rational creatures, were responsible for any infringement of the Holy Law committed by the women of their household.[22]

In the generation following Ibn Taymiyya's, the North African jurist Ibn al-Ḥājj, a longtime resident of Cairo, held up the marriage of his own shaykh as an example of the proper fulfillment of the moral burden of the adult male. His shaykh had informed Ibn al-Ḥājj: "When I married, I told my wife, 'Don't make a move and don't say a word in my absence without telling me about it when I return, for I am responsible for all your actions. I was responsible for myself alone but now I am responsible for myself and for you.'" Although his wife complied, obediently relating her words and actions at the end of each day, so great was the shaykh's fear that, in her ignorance, the woman might do something in violation of sacred law that "it reached the point where he would say to her, 'If you move the water jar from one spot to another, you had better tell me.'" Such supervision of a wife or wives, although tedious, was necessary, Ibn al-Ḥājj maintained, and should extend as well to the master's male and female slaves, for "there is no difference, they are also his 'flock' [*raʿīya*]."[23]

The spatial and moral etiquette of the household, as both a physical and a social entity; the complex use of clothing as well as space for seclusion and separation; and the perceived responsibilities of the master of the house for the moral lives of his dependents, especially for the women among them, were far more than "domestic" or "private" concerns as we understand those terms today. When the household was also an imperial center, there was no "domestic" concern that was not also political.

The Citadel as Sacred Space

When, in a time of political crisis, the chief of the royal eunuchs, the *zimāmdār* Kāfūr, closed off the Citadel in Cairo and denied access to a

party of rebellious amirs on the grounds that "the *ḥarīm* of the sultan is present in the Citadel," he made use of a moral vocabulary that everyone involved both understood and accepted. Kāfūr had, as it were, pushed the *dihlīz* to the gates of the Citadel and extended the "sanctuary" of the sultan's private apartments, the residence of his *ḥarīm,* to the entire fortified area. As the recognized guardian of the boundaries of domestic privacy, Kāfūr could justly argue that since the master of the house, in this case the sultan, was not present to give his *idhn,* or permission, for outsiders to enter the inner sanctum of his home, he could not open up the Citadel.[24]

The eunuch inside the Citadel gates and the amirs outside were aware of the fact that what they were discussing was a serious political issue. They chose, however, to employ the language of household etiquette. The amirs, who politely responded to Kāfūr, "We do not intend rapine [*nahb*] but only want to take our master's son," were in reality trying to effect a transfer of power. Likewise, Kāfūr, as one of the most powerful of the royal eunuchs, who, as a group, generally avoided any overt involvement in armed conflicts, was simply buying time in order to delay a direct confrontation between hostile factions.[25] Both parties realized that the real danger of *fitna* in this case was not sexual—despite the pretense of extending the *ḥarīm* area to the whole Citadel—but political. Kāfūr, however, had summoned up a universally recognized model of domestic space and had thus forced the political discourse, at least temporarily, into terms in which he possessed a distinct moral advantage.

It is not surprising that the sanctuarylike quality of the household should be most clearly articulated in the etiquette surrounding the Cairo Citadel, the principal household of the empire. In his paean to the city of Cairo, the fifteenth-century Mamluk topographer Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, the son of a freedman of Sultan Ṭaṭar, and himself a high-ranking military official under Sultans Barsbay and Jaqmaq, compared the area of the great cemetery of Cairo, the Qarafa, containing the tombs of the brothers of Joseph and the tomb of the mystic poet and holy man ʿUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ, to the sanctuary of Hebron and the Cairo Citadel to "noble Jerusalem." Even though he carefully modified the latter comparison with the qualifying statement "not in the degree of honor/sanctity [*lā fīʾl ḥurma*]," the association made between the third holiest sanctuary of Islam and the residence of the sultan is striking.[26]

In the sultan's household, as in any affluent home, eunuchs both

supervised and acted as intermediaries for the royal *ḥarīm* and guarded other boundaries of moral etiquette. The Citadel itself could not be entered without passing through a *darkāh*, "where the amirs sit until they are given permission to enter."[27] A door at the back of the *darkāh* opened onto an angled hallway, which led to yet another door. From there, depending on the errand and status of the visitor, an assigned path led through a complex system of interior doors and gateways. A corps of eunuchs was permanently assigned to these portals of transitional space.[28]

Several hundred eunuchs served in various capacities in the Citadel: the eunuchs of the portals, the eunuchs of the Gate of the Veil, the eunuchs of the barracks, eunuch cupbearers, eunuchs of the royal wardrobe, eunuchs of the royal treasury, and other eunuchs with various duties. Among them, however, two prominent eunuch officials stand out for the authority they exercised over the people and the space that constituted the locus of political power: the sultan's household.

The eunuch *zimāmdār* supervised the sultan's intimate family, which resided in the Noble Dwellings (al-Ādur al-Sharīfa), accessible through the Gate of the Veil (Bāb al-Sitāra). This family consisted of the sultan's *ḥarīm*: his royal wives and daughters; his very young sons; his slave women, the highest status being accorded to his concubines; and in some cases the sultan's own mother and unmarried female relatives. The descriptions of the physical structure of this sector of the sultan's household include five great named "halls," each assigned, in order of precedence, to the sultan's four wives, with the fifth hall assigned collectively to his concubines. There were also numbers of slave women and eunuchs resident in the Noble Dwellings who provided the array of services, from highly skilled to menial, necessary for the comfort and prestige of such a large extended household. A corps of eunuchs, also under the supervision of the *zimāmdār*, guarded access to the Gate of the Veil.[29]

Similarly, the eunuch *muqaddam al-mamālīk al-ṣulṭāniyya* (commander of the sultan's mamluks) was directly responsible for the sultan's military family, consisting of his young slave recruits, who lived in the Citadel barracks-school (*ṭibāq*) during their period of training in a condition of seclusion which, in theory, was not unlike that of a *ḥarīm*. Each barrack, or *ṭabaqa*, was a large structure "with the dimensions of a city quarter," which served as a residence and school for the mamluk cadets. A eunuch *muqaddam al-ṭabaqa* (barracks chief) was assigned to

each one of these structures. Beneath these barracks chiefs was a second tier of eunuchs, who were individually responsible for the proper upbringing (*tarbiya*) of specific cadets under their care. All these eunuch *muqaddamūn* and their subalterns answered to the *muqaddam al-mamālīk al-ṣulṭāniyya* who, like his counterpart the *zimāmdār* of the sultan's *ḥarīm,* had ultimate responsibility not only for the cadets but also for the numerous slaves and freed or free-born employees who were the teachers, coaches, and servants in the barracks-school.[30]

The *muqaddam al-mamalīk* and the *zimāmdār* guarded the *ḥurma,* the sacred honor of the sultan, by properly managing his two "families," the complementary halves of his extended household. These two "families"—one largely female, based on slavery, clientage, and kinship, the other male and based on the metaphorical kinship of slavery and clientage—were not mutually exclusive. The sultan's sons were often educated in the barracks-schools with the mamluk cadets. When the cadets graduated from the barracks and were allowed to leave the seclusion of their quarters in the Citadel, they were often married to young women who had been raised and educated as slaves within the sultan's *ḥarīm.* In Mamluk texts both the *zimāmdār* and the *muqaddam* are represented as guardians of moral boundaries. Both, the texts say, should be of good character and manners. But they must both also have the qualities of *ḥamiyya,* an ardent, almost fanatical passion in the pursuit of their duties as well as zeal (*ghayra*) in safeguarding their charges. Just as the *zimāmdār* must guard against sexual transgressions by or against the women of the household, the *muqaddam* has similar responsibilities for adolescent boys, who, like women, are portrayed as being potential sources of *fitna,* or sexual temptation and disorder.[31]

Wealthy homes, especially military homes, often had the same domestic structure as the Citadel and included a eunuch *zimām* to supervise the *ḥarīm;* a eunuch *muqaddam* to train and manage the young mamluks; and various other eunuch household officers, both slaves and freed people. In the Citadel, however, the Master of the House was the ruler of an empire, and there were times when the eunuchs were the only emissaries between him and his subjects. The *khuddām al-ḥawsh*—the eunuchs who sat in the *ḥawsh,* the large royal courtyard inside the Citadel—could send away petitioners and cancel audiences, denying entrance even to the high-ranking amirs.[32]

The sultan was, in and of himself, a kind of sanctuary, and the eunuchs who surrounded him not only controlled access to his person

and his family but also served to emphasize the sacred power of rulership. When the Venetian monk Francesco Suriano, prior of the Franciscan monastery of Mount Zion in Jerusalem in the late 1400s, attempted to evoke the Cairo Citadel for his sister Sixta and her fellow nuns of the Poor Claires of Santa Lucia in distant Foligno, he sent them this description:

> In this city [Cairo] there is a big and very strong castle in which the sultan dwells with all his court and guards which number 12,000 mamelukes. This castle has 14 iron doors by which you pass if you wish to go before his presence for an audience: at these doors there is a permanent guard and, at the last, for greater fidelity and honor, are the eunuchs with so much pomp and fame that they are revered by all, even by the lords and admirals of a thousand lances.[33]

One way of representing a religious sanctuary, a *ḥaram* or sacred enclave, whether an ancient pre-Islamic shrine such as the Kaʿba or the twentieth-century Arabian *ḥawṭas* described by R. B. Serjeant, is to describe it as consisting of two concentric circles.[34] The inner circle contains the shrine itself, the source of power, such as the actual Prophet's Chamber (*al-ḥujra al-nabawiyya*), the structure encompassing the tomb of the Prophet inside his mosque in Madina. The entire *ḥaram*, the mosque enclosure within which the tomb stands, is heavily invested with *baraka*, or charisma. The outer circle, the space surrounding the shrine—the city of Madina, for example—is also a *ḥaram* but is less clearly defined and less sacred than the core area.

If one sees the Cairo Citadel as a kind of sanctuary, the sultan himself is the "shrine," the focus of power.[35] His private apartments, so carefully guarded by the eunuchs, form the inner circle. When the eunuch Kāfūr locked out the amirs he was making use of a cultural construct that could apply to any household. But the Citadel itself was also described as being "like a city," and some amirs had homes within its walls. When Kāfūr denied the amirs entrance even into the "outer circle" of the Citadel, he was manipulating the space of sanctuary by extending the forbidden quality of the inner circle, the *ḥarīm*, to the entire structure.

Suriano, a longtime resident of the Mamluk Empire, understood at least in part the value of the eunuchs "revered by all" in the royal ceremonial of the Citadel. What he may not have recognized was that for his Muslim contemporaries, the very presence of eunuchs surround-

ing the sultan in the inner sanctum of the Citadel may have set off a series of associations with other, even more powerful charismatic centers. For the amir Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, son of a Citadel-raised mamluk and himself a member of the military elite, the Citadel was clearly the center of Egypt, of the empire, and of his own social world. His equation of Citadel and sanctuary (*ḥaram*) was within the context of a discussion of the shrines and the tombs of Cairo, the *ziyārāt*, or "places of visitation," a ritual context familiar to any member of Mamluk society, whether military or civilian.

In the topography of his text, Ibn Shāhīn's merging of the Citadel and Jerusalem is paired with his merging of Hebron and the Ibn al-Fāriḍ/brothers of Joseph complex of the Cairo cemetery, the Qarafa,[36] just as Jerusalem and Hebron are, in reality, geographically paired as "the Two Noble Sanctuaries" of Palestine. In Hebron, as in the Qarafa of Cairo, it is the tombs that are the sources of *baraka*, or charisma. In Jerusalem it is the rock over which the Dome of the Rock is constructed that is the charismatic center of the sanctuary. In the Citadel it is the numinous quality of kingship, embodied in the ceremonial person of the sultan, which gives the entire physical structure a near-sacred quality.

Just as the corps of eunuchs in the Citadel effectively surrounded the person of the Mamluk sultan, societies of eunuchs guarded and controlled access to the great sanctuaries of Islam: the Kaʿba in Mecca, the tomb of the Prophet in Madina, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and the tombs of the Patriarchs in Hebron.[37] The largest society of eunuchs, and by far the wealthiest and most prestigious, was that of the "eunuchs of the Prophet," a cultic organization which appears to have been established in Madina in the sixth century A.H./twelfth century C.E., and which, by the Mamluk period, can best be described as a powerful and deeply symbolic "priesthood" of some forty eunuchs, all with endowed, lifetime positions, who were perpetually stationed at the tomb of the Prophet.

Whether as a conscious reflection of the eunuch society of Madina, or perhaps as an appropriation of an older tradition linking eunuchs with royal tombs and thus preserving the ceremony of the ruler's court even in death, similar endowed positions for eunuchs appear in the provisions for the funerary complexes of individuals of high status in Mamluk Cairo, notably in the tombs of sultans. It is clear from the descriptions of the role of these eunuchs, and in particular from their spatial location in the tomb complexes, that the power of the eunuchs both to establish

sacred boundaries and to cross those boundaries safely extended beyond the world of the living into the world of the dead.

Eunuchs and the World of the Dead

When he had finally outwitted his father's amirs and ascended the throne of Egypt and Syria for the third time, the twenty-two-year-old Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad immediately took possession of the half-finished *madrasa,* or mosque-college, which his rival the amir Kitboghā had begun in the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn area, the Royal Way of old Fatimid Cairo, adjacent to the tomb of Sultan Qalāwūn, al-Nāṣir's own father and Kitboghā's manumitter. Behind the monumental entryway, a Gothic portal from a Crusader church in Acre carried off as booty by al-Nāṣir's warrior brother al-Ashraf Khalīl, the young sultan completed the construction of a cruciform college, which contained the largest *īwān* (vaulted chamber) devoted to the teaching of the Mālikī school of jurisprudence, apartments for students who would study with the professors of all four major schools of Islamic law (each professor holding an endowed chair amply supported by the revenue of a special trust), and a splendid library. According to al-Maqrīzī, the exterior walls of the college, which would now be known as the Nāṣiriyya, had been built by Kitboghā up to "the gold inscription band," and Khalīl's Gothic doorway was already in place.[38]

The symbolic importance of the location of the college, in the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, adjacent to the grandiose hospital-college-tomb complex of Sultan Qalāwūn and across from the college of Sultan Baybars al-Bunduqdārī and the tomb of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, the master and manumitter of both Baybars and Qalāwūn, would have been as apparent to Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad as it had been to the deposed Sultan Kitboghā.[39] A Mālikī judge, Ibn Makhlūf, went to a great deal of effort to purchase the structure legally for the new sultan (to avoid any appearance of arbitrary confiscation from Kitboghā's heirs) and was rewarded with the post of professor of Mālikī jurisprudence at the completed college.[40]

Adjoining the college the sultan constructed a domed tomb chamber, to which he moved the body of his mother after the entire complex had been completed in 703/1304. Several years later, when al-Nāṣir's favorite son, Ānūk, died at the age of eighteen, his father had him buried

next to his grandmother and founded a special trust solely for the up-keep of the tomb complex and for readers of the Qur'an, who would continually recite the Holy Book within the tomb area. The historian and topographer Tāqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, who was born more than half a century after this tomb complex had been completed, set down his own impressions of it: "I had the opportunity to visit this college and it was honored to the highest degree; a number of eunuchs [*ṭawāshiya*] sat in its vestibule [*dihlīz*] and no stranger could enter."[41]

If the homes of the living possessed a sanctuarylike quality, the homes of the dead—especially the royal dead—possessed that quality to an even greater degree. The *dihlīz* of the Nāṣiriyya complex, like the *dihlīz* of a prosperous household, the home of a living, breathing family of men, women, and children, was a corridor between the outside world and a certain protected, quasi-sacred area of moral-physical space. As guardians in the world of the dead, the eunuchs of the Nāṣiriyya—whom al-Maqrīzī refers to by the term he reserves for "high-ranking eunuchs" (*ṭawāshiya*)—performed essentially the same function as their counterparts in the world of the living. They made certain that no "stranger" (*gharīb*) penetrated the protected zone. Their very presence made the college "honored," almost sacred (*muḥtarama*).

When the eunuchs of al-Maqrīzī's text compel the reader to pause at the *dihlīz* of his description of the Nāṣiriyya, they mirror their poetic counterparts in the vestibule of al-Ghuzūlī's "dwelling of joy." If we hold up a series of mirrors to the text, the figures of the eunuchs are reflected and replicated in other architectural spaces: the Citadel of Cairo, where the royal eunuchs surround the sultan when he is in seclusion; the great sanctuary of Madina, where eunuchs guard access to the Prophet's tomb.

Because of the manner in which the entire complex of the Nāṣiriyya was constructed, the *dihlīz*, which one still enters from Khalīl's Gothic doorway, was and is a means of access to both the college and the *qubba*, or domed tomb chamber.[42] For the real locus of power in this structure, as in any *ḥaram* or sanctuary like that of Madina, was the tomb chamber, the "first circle" of the sanctuary. The primary concern of the eunuchs was to protect this "first circle." The college itself, like the "second circle" of a sanctuary, shared in its sanctity by extension.

In the adjacent tomb of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's father, Sultan Qalāwūn, the eunuch guardians were stationed not in the *dihlīz* of the great hospital-college complex of which the tomb was a part but in the

spacious *qā'a* ("hall," or, in this case, a marble-paved courtyard) leading into the domed tomb chamber. This courtyard—the only means of access to the tomb—served functionally as a *dihlīz* or vestibule by establishing an intermediate zone between the noise and activity of the hospital and the magnificent tomb chamber.[43]

One hundred years after the completion of Qalāwūn's great complex, Sultan Barqūq built his own mausoleum with an attached *madrasa* and Sufi *khānqāh* (convent) in the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, adjacent to the complex built by Qalāwūn's son, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. The eunuch guardians of his tomb were also to reside in the *qā'a,* or courtyard, which led into the domed tomb chamber, a provision which he carefully outlined in his endowment deed for the complex:

> As for the area which leads into the tomb, he [the founder, Barqūq] places the *qā'a* which is in it into an endowment for the dwelling place of the eunuchs [*al-khuddām al-khiṣyān*] who will be in this building so that they may enjoy the right of residence there.[44]

After his death Barqūq's body was not interred in this mausoleum but was moved by his son, Sultan Faraj, to a new and more grandiose complex which Barqūq had begun outside the city walls. The three eunuchs supported by Barqūq's original foundation presumably stood vigil over his wives and daughters, whose bodies remain to this day interred in the tomb on the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn. Sultan Barqūq, however, continued to hold court in the world of the dead with his eunuch guards around him, for Sultan Faraj's deed setting up the trust fund for the complex outside the city also contained specific provisions for two eunuchs who were to control access to his father's tomb.[45]

When Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, the freedman of Barqūq who eventually deposed Sultan Faraj, planned his own great college-mosque-tomb complex, he envisioned two domed tomb chambers and made provisions for two eunuchs to reside not in the corridors of access but in the tombs themselves:

> Let there be appointed in the two domed tomb chambers which are part of the aforementioned mosque two prudent and well-educated eunuchs [*khādimayn ṭawāshīyatayn 'āqilayn ādūbayn*] to be resident in the two domed chambers and to undertake what is the custom for those like them to undertake by way of service as is the custom.[46]

High-ranking persons close to the sultan, founders of other, less magnificent tombs, buildings that were not part of larger institutions,

also placed their eunuch guardians in the actual tomb chamber itself, as al-Mu'ayyad had done. The deed of pious foundation set up by the eunuch Shāhīn al-Ḥasanī, who had been chief of the royal corps of Masters of the Robe (*ra'īs nawbat al-jamdāriyya*) under Sultan Faraj, provides for "a man who is one of the people of probity and piety, of morality, chastity, and fidelity, a eunuch from among the freed people of the founder of the endowment," who would enjoy the right of perpetual residence (*iqāma*) in Shāhīn's tomb, which had yet to be constructed.[47]

The wealthy and highly controversial civilian official Zayn al-Dīn Yaḥyā, the *ustadār* or royal majordomo, a Coptic convert to Islam, set up a liberal endowment in 864/1460 for the tomb which he had built for his own burial and for that "of his male children who die before the age of puberty" and also set aside the right of residence in this structure to "the most righteous eunuch" from among his freed people, giving priority to those "from the white race [*min jins al-bīḍ*]."[48]

The architectural space these eunuchs occupy within the endowment deeds varies in name from vestibule (*dihlīz*) to courtyard or hall (*qā'a*) but this space always serves within the overall structure as a corridor of access—or a place of exclusion—for any living person who seeks to enter the presence of the dead.[49] The descriptions of the expected role of the eunuch guardians of these corridors share certain common themes. Eunuch guardians had the right and the obligation of residence day and night in or near the tomb. They were to be people of high moral character who would devote themselves to the protection and management of the tomb. The endowment deed for Sultan Qaitbay's mausoleum complex in the northern cemetery outside Cairo stipulates the appointment of a eunuch guardian that "he might pledge himself to the tomb."[50] The most important duty of such guardians, one that was repeatedly emphasized in the endowment deeds, was the zealous monitoring of access to the dead.

In 760/1359, in one of the endowment deeds for his great mausoleum-*madrasa* complex beneath the Citadel, Sultan Ḥasan stipulated the appointment of ten eunuch guardians for his tomb who were to be *azimma* (sing. *zimām*, supervisors, people of authority), "loyal and trustworthy." They were to reside in the tomb in order to "protect it and guard it from anyone from among the people of blame and corruption [*fasād*] who might seek to gain access to it."[51] *Zimām* was also the title of the eunuch guardian of the women of a living household. Just as the authority of the guardians of the tomb was described in terms of protec-

tion (*ḥifẓ*) and guarding (*ṣiyāna*), the authority of the *zimām* of women was based on these same terms. A common title of respect for Mamluk women was *maṣūna,* "the well-guarded one." The eunuchs who controlled access to the domestic sanctuary, like the eunuch guardians of the dead, maintained the boundaries against *fasād* (corruption), a word that, like *fitna* (temptation), had connotations which were both sexual and political.[52]

The very presence of these eunuch guardians was a powerful and complex symbolic statement. On one level they evoked the "noble sanctuary" of Madina (and possibly resonated as well with the sanctuaries of Mecca, Hebron, and Jerusalem). On another they also represented a re-creation of the household-palace in the tomb. Al-Maqrīzī, in his description of the eunuch guardians of the tomb of Qalāwūn, bluntly and somewhat disapprovingly presents this connection:

> The purpose of the kings in setting up the eunuchs in this courtyard which is the means of access to the actual tomb chamber is to establish the majesty [*nāmūs*] of a king after death as it had been in life. And until this day the eunuchs will not allow anyone to enter the tomb except for the people who are connected to it. And, by God, how correct were the words of Yaḥyā ibn Ḥakam al-Bakrī when he said:
>
> I see wealthy people when they die
> They build those tombs out of rocks
> They desire naught but vainglory
> Lording it over the lowly even from the tomb.[53]

The widespread presence of such eunuch guardians in the tombs of the Mamluk sultans and in those of other high-ranking Mamluk officials must also be viewed within the context of practices that one might call an Islamic cult of the dead. In medieval Cairo this cult of the dead held a strong appeal for both the Turco-Circassian Mamluk military elite and for Egyptian civilians of all social groups. Despite the oppositional voice of a minority of radical jurists, the religious culture of Mamluk Cairo was unified and dominated by this cult. Within this context, the presence of eunuchs in tombs—especially in the tombs of the royal dead—was a natural extension of the elaborate concerns for privacy and prestige that affected the living.

By the late thirteenth century, when the Mamluk Empire, the "*dawla* of the Turks," came into existence in Egypt, most Muslim people living within the House of Islam, no matter what vocabulary of ethnicity, of occupation, or of regional, sectarian, or kinship loyalties they used to

define themselves, shared in a common ritual landscape. This landscape was dotted with tomb-centered shrines, places where there was not so much a "joining of Heaven and Earth"[54] as a concentration of charisma, the *baraka* of the dead, which, like their intercession (*wasīla, shafāʿa*), could best be obtained by physical proximity to the tombs themselves, by the rites of visitation (*ziyāra*).[55]

Within the Egyptian context, however, the practice of the visiting of tombs (*ziyārat al-qubūr*) extended beyond the veneration of the tombs of specific holy men and women to include a whole set of rituals and practices that maintained a strong continuity between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The great Qarāfa, the sprawling cemetery outside Cairo, was an urban community in and of itself, a mirror of the living city. Under the Mamluks, building activity in the Qarāfa reached an unprecedented level; the area occupied by the cemetery increased dramatically, and tombs and tomb complexes spilled over into the open space outside the old Gate of Victory, Bāb al-Naṣr, and into the city itself.[56]

On one level the Qarāfa, this "white city," as al-Maqrīzī described it, was the residence of living human beings. Hosts of Qur'an readers, Sufis, teachers, students, orphans, and beggars were supported by the convents, mosques, primary schools, and colleges connected to the large tomb complexes of the wealthy. The tombs of the Qarāfa, however, and the tomb complexes inside the city were also the residence of the countless dead, who, far from being merely passive objects of grief and veneration, continued to take part in the affairs of their living families and to play an active role in the social world of the cemetery. The relevant tradition attributed to the Prophet—"Cursed be those who visit tombs and cursed be those who place upon them mosques and lamps"—was often quoted by a small group of radical scholars, followers of the doctrines of the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya, but was generally ignored by the rest of the population.[57]

People from every sector of the great urban conglomeration of Cairo and Fustat built structures on or near the tombs of family members—structures that were individually referred to as *bayt al-mayyit*, "the house of the dead." Such a house, to the horror of conservative purists, served as the dwelling place of the deceased, the physical area where, according to popular belief, he or she could still meet with living relatives, discuss family problems, and share symbolically in their meals. Not only during the period of *taʿziya*, or mourning, but also on Friday

nights and on the night of the fourteenth of the month of Shaʿbān, the family of the deceased would spend the night in this *bayt al-mayyit,* thus merging the living household with the household of the dead.[58]

The North African jurist Ibn al-Ḥājj, a virulent opponent of the Egyptian manifestations of the cult of the dead, reserved his special wrath for the wealthy and powerful people of Cairo, amirs and others, who built their elaborate tomb complexes within the city itself and who interred the dead not in a grave but in an underground sepulchre. Because of their *mubāhāh* (vainglory), the wealthy sought to make these tombs into a replica of "the houses in which the sons of this world take haughty pride while they are still alive—one always trying to outdo the other."[59] His negative opinion, however, was not shared by another North African observer. The traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who visited Cairo in 725/1325, was, like most visitors to Egypt, whether Muslim or Christian, deeply impressed by the "beautiful tombs . . . like houses" of the Qarāfa.[60]

To the merchant Emmanuel Piloti (writing ca. 1407), the Qarāfa was "an unwalled city, as great as Venice, with its high and low buildings." Everyone, he maintained, had a residence in this city, the "low buildings [hostelz bas]" serving for the sepulchres of the dead and the "high buildings [hostelz haulx]" for the gathering of the living and the dispensing of alms to the poor.[61] The French monk Jean Thenaud, an official envoy of the Countess of Savoy, was also impressed by the size of the Qarāfa. He noted that the women of Cairo visited the tombs on Friday and covered them with jasmine, roses, sweet basil, and balsam, "and they say on that day the souls of the deceased feast on the scents."[62]

What outraged Ibn al-Ḥājj and impressed Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Piloti, Thenaud, and others, both Muslim and non-Muslim, was not just the beauty of the tombs and the worldly pride which they represented but the assumption of a very real continuity between the social world of the living and that of the dead. The tombs were replicas of the homes of the living, real houses in which the occupants after death were believed to have many of the same social concerns they had known in their lifetime.

The world of the dead, like that of the living, was one in which the household—both the physical structure and the ties of loyalty among the people who inhabited it—continued to play a vital role. A common feature of the endowment deeds outlining the provisions for eunuch guardians of tombs is that, in most cases, the initial cohort of eunuchs was to be drawn from the freed people of the tomb's founder and were

to be buried in it. The endowment deed for the great complex of Sultan Ḥasan stipulates that the ten eunuchs who were to serve as his tomb guardians be recruited from the Sultan's own freedmen, from the freedmen of his children, or from the freedmen of his deceased father, Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. If no eunuchs in these categories could be found, the administrator of the endowment was to buy eunuch slaves and manumit them in the name of Sultan Ḥasan.[63] The eunuchs who guarded the entryway to a tomb mirrored the role of their counterparts in the vestibule or *dihlīz* of a living household, and were in fact, at least initially, often the same individuals who had controlled access to the dead person's home or to his person during his lifetime.

When the deceased person was a woman from a sultan's family, a *khawand*,[64] the eunuchs who guarded her tomb could demonstrate the same zeal in preserving her in death as *ḥarīm*, both sacred and forbidden, that her own eunuchs would have demonstrated in her lifetime. The tomb complex of Ṭaṭar al-Ḥijāziyya, the daughter of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, is located in the Jamalīya area of Cairo, not far from the more grandiose structures built by her father and grandfather. According to al-Maqrīzī's description, the *ṭawāshiya* stationed in the college courtyard—from which one gained entrance to the actual tomb—maintained strict control over access to the presence of the dead *khawand* and stringently enforced the rules of decorum appropriate to a woman of her rank.

> A number of eunuchs are seated there [in the college] and no one can cross over into the domed tomb chamber which contains the sepulchre of the *khawand* al-Ḥijāziyya except for the Qur'an readers, and they can enter only at the appointed time for their recitation. It happened once that one of the readers had a grudge against one of his colleagues. He went to the chief eunuch [*kabīr al-ṭawāshiya*] of this tomb and said, "So-and-so entered the tomb today and he was not wearing his under-trousers [*sarāwīl*]." The eunuch was infuriated by this, for he considered this a serious misdeed and a great sin. He had that reader brought before him and beaten in his presence while he said repeatedly to him, "You dare to enter the presence of a *khawand* without *sarāwīl!*" The eunuch intended to dismiss that reader from his position and would have done so were it not for the intercession of some important people.[65]

The *sarāwīl,* or loose trousers worn under one or more outer robes, was a basic feature in the attire of both men and women.[66] The accusa-

tion against the unfortunate Qur'an reader was serious, for he, a stranger, neither a eunuch of the *khawand* nor one of her intimate blood kin, had entered the presence of this royal woman, the daughter of a revered sultan, in a state of semidress.[67] From the point of view of the chief eunuch of the tomb, Ṭaṭar in death still participated in the same social and sexual mores that had maintained her honor and prestige in her lifetime. It was only because the *khawand* now found herself in the special circumstances of death that strange men, the Qur'an readers, were allowed into her presence as she lay veiled in her sepulchre. The mere allegation that one of these men, whose comings and goings were so carefully monitored by the eunuchs, could enter her tomb improperly dressed and thus, in a sense, violate the sanctity of a royal *ḥarīm* was enough to enrage the eunuchs responsible for her protection.

The authority that Ṭaṭar's eunuchs exercised over the Qur'an readers employed within her tomb complex was not dictated solely by her gender. The description of the duties of such eunuch guardians in the surviving endowment deeds for tomb complexes set up by and for men makes it clear that the eunuchs controlled not only access to the tomb proper but also the activities of all individuals connected in any way to the tomb complex. The eunuchs in the tomb complex of Sultan Barqūq, for example, were given broad authority over the management of the tomb and its functionaries as well as automatic inclusion in the company of Sufis attached to the complex:

> The administrator [of the foundation] should appoint three individuals who are eunuchs from among the freed people of our lord the Sultan, author of the foundation, may God preserve his reign, or from other than his freed people to be included among the aforementioned company of sixty Sufis in the tomb which is a part of the aforementioned college. They [the eunuchs] are to live in the *qāʿa* which is in the aforementioned tomb, and they are to deny entrance to the tomb to those who have no specific business and no need. They are to guard the tomb as is the custom; they are to keep track of the absences of those who are appointed to positions in the tomb; they are to inspect the conditions of this college every day and encourage the janitors to sweep the college and the tomb and to clean them . . . as is the custom in that. And each one is to receive ten dirhams . . . a month in addition to what they receive from their appointment as Sufis.[68]

Likewise, the eunuch guardian who was to be appointed to the as yet nonexistent tomb of the royal eunuch Shāhīn, "the tomb which the

author of the foundation will build, whether it is in the lands of Egypt or in a foreign land or wherever it might be," was to receive one hundred dirhams a month

> on the provision that he take up residence in the tomb and take charge of the supervision of the employees in the tomb so that they fulfill the aforementioned offices according to the proper manner as prescribed by the Holy Law. He will also take charge of the transportation of water from the reservoir which the founder will build at the site of the tomb, and he [the eunuch] will supervise the distribution of that water to the thirsty poor.[69]

Shāhīn also set aside the usual funds for candles for the tomb and for the implements necessary for water distribution. Everything (*kull al-aṣnāf*) was to be handed over to the eunuch.[70] Eunuchs, guardians of boundaries, were symbols of social order. Placing eunuchs in these supervisory positions, which carried with them an authority that sometimes extended to the entire tomb complex, clearly introduced yet another level in the associations their presence was meant to evoke. In the context of the cult of the dead, the control of disorder took on added significance.

Although the world of the dead appears, at first glance, to have been an exact reflection of the world of the living, it was in reality a distorted looking-glass world in which the normal rules of behavior were at times maintained and at times turned upside down. The fact that the rituals involved in the cult of the dead were ones in which women were active, and that women, even under normal circumstances, were sources of *fitna,* added to the danger inherent in such a situation. The only times when a free woman appeared unveiled in public were when she followed a funeral as a mourner and when she visited the tombs. Adult women, whose behavior was modest in their own homes and in the streets of the city itself, would uncover their faces once they reached the Qarāfa, and would join together in singing and dancing. Groups of women would meet at the tombs for picnics. They would bring along tambourines, hire their own female preacher (*wāʿiẓa*), laugh out loud and flirt with young boys. Men were also given to loud and boisterous behavior and crowded together with women to hear the storytellers and popular preachers who plied their trade among the tombs. According to Ibn al-Ḥājj, the women unveiled here "just as if they were in the privacy of their homes, in the presence of their husbands."[71] Ritualized as such behavior may have been within the rules of an accepted cult and within

prescribed physical space (the Qarāfa or the tomb complexes within the city), it still introduced a dangerous possibility of *fitna,* or complete moral disruption, into the world of the dead.

The tombs that maintained eunuch guardians were to some extent protected from the more subversive aspects of the rituals surrounding the cult of the dead. These tombs were, after all, the homes in the world of the dead of people who automatically commanded deference—either sultans and members of their families or wealthy, powerful figures in the army or the bureaucracy. The eunuchs who lived in or near these tombs carefully controlled access to the actual presence of the dead. One of the necessary features in any prestigious tomb, however, was the constant chanting of the Qur'an by professional cantors. Since the great complexes included several institutions, the sheer numbers of such Qur'an readers, as well as affiliated students and faculty, Sufis, orphan boys, teachers, imams, and muezzins, along with janitors, cooks, water carriers, and doorkeepers, contributed to the possibilities of disorder. Added to this crowd of male figures, many of whom were unmarried adolescents, were the visitors, male and female, for whom the tombs of dead rulers often took on the same status as the tombs of holy men and women. The immediate task of the eunuchs attached to the tomb complex was to monitor the behavior of the individuals in this diverse crowd—a crowd by its very nature charged with the potential for *fitna*—and to make sure that none of them offended the *ḥurma,* or sacred honor, of the dead.

The provisions for the eunuch guardian in the endowment deed of the majordomo Zayn al-Dīn Yaḥyā make it clear that, for at least some individuals, the danger of sexual *fitna,* rendered even more dangerous within the context of the world of the dead, was a major concern when they planned their tombs:

> As for the tomb which he has built . . . the founder places it in an endowment and makes it a burial place for himself and for the burial of his male children who die before the age of puberty. He also assigns residence in the tomb . . . to the eunuch/servant of the burial place whom he appoints as his eunuch/servant to live there without women. And the founder—may God accept his charity from him—appoints to this office the most righteous of his freed people from among the eunuchs [*ṭawāshiya*] of all races, then after them to the most righteous of his freed people from among his white male slaves. But he makes it a condition that priority in this office and in [the right

> of] residence goes to the most righteous of the eunuchs of the white race in particular—and all that with no residence of women. And if there is no one suitable from among his white eunuch freedmen or if there was one who went away, then the administrator of the endowment is to appoint the most righteous of his eunuch freedmen from among the Ethiopians and the blacks in the same manner. But if there is no one suitable, he is to appoint the most righteous from among his white male uncastrated [fuḥūl] freedmen.[72]

The majordomo obviously wanted the person residing in his tomb to be a member of his household. Unlike other individuals who endowed eunuch tomb guardians, he was not willing for the office, in the absence of a eunuch freedman of his own, to pass to a eunuch from outside his household. The language of his endowment deed deliberately makes uses of the ambiguity of the word *khādim,* "servant," the common euphemism for "eunuch," to allow for the possibility that a non-eunuch could, as a last resort, hold this office.

Despite the majordomo's strong racial bias, evinced in other provisions in this same deed, in favor of his white slaves, he gave his black eunuchs priority in this matter over his white male slaves. (His black uncastrated male slaves do not even enter into consideration for the office.) The majordomo's future residence in the world of the dead was to be, in some ways, a mirror of his household, staffed by his own manumitted slaves and reflecting the master's racial bias. But the tomb, existing as it would in the looking-glass world of the dead, was also to be a kind of male *ḥarīm,* set aside for the master and his prepubescent male children and protected by guardians who presented no risk of *fitna.* For the majordomo's non-eunuch white freedmen could enjoy the salary and the right of residence in the tomb only if they lived there in a state of celibacy and became, as it were, functional eunuchs.[73]

Prophet and Sultan

The ceremonial role of eunuchs in the world of the powerful dead was not only a Sunni phenomenon. Outside the Mamluk Empire the eunuch guardians of at least one sacred Shiʿi tomb attracted the attention of the traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. After journeying from Cairo to the Hijaz (where he noted the wealth and prestige of the eunuchs of Madina), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa went on to Najaf to visit the Mashhad ʿAlī, the tomb of the Prophet's

martyred son-in-law, the fourth caliph of Islam, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, revered by Sunni and Shiʿi alike, but under Shiʿi control and, for obvious reasons, of particular significance to the Shiʿi community. There Ibn Baṭṭūṭa found an entire royal retinue—including eunuchs—guarding the threshold of the tomb complex. Stationed outside the entrance to the domed tomb chamber with the chamberlains (*ḥujjāb*) and deputies (*nuqabāʾ*) of the dead caliph, the eunuchs played out an elaborate tableau vivant of a sovereign's court.

> From this college, one enters the door of the tomb and at its door are the chamberlains, the deputies, and the eunuchs [ṭawāshiya]. Whenever a visitor arrives, one or all of them—depending on the rank of the visitor—rise to meet him and to accompany him to the threshold. They ask permission for him [to enter] and say: "O, Commander of the Faithful! This weak slave awaits your command and asks permission to enter the exalted garden if you allow him. If not, he will depart. Even if he does not merit this, you are beneficent and protective." Then they order the visitor to kiss the threshold, which is made of silver, and also the two columns. Then he enters the tomb.[74]

In the tomb of the Prophet, however, royal ceremonial was never so overtly reproduced as it was in the tomb of his son-in-law. For Sunni Muslims ʿAlī was the fourth in succession of the "rightly guided" caliphs, but for the Shiʿis who built and maintained his tomb in Najaf, he represented the first and only legitimate ruler of the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet. He was also the "friend of God" and, along with the designated imams among his progeny, was held to possess qualities that bordered on the divine. It is not surprising that by the twelfth century, the Imam ʿAlī, whose Shiʿi followers were on the losing side of the competition with strong Sunni sultans, would also be accorded the ceremonial dignity of a living sultan.

Muḥammad, as the last and greatest of the prophets, obviously merited the same *taʿẓīm* (magnification) that any temporal ruler enjoyed. But the Prophet Muḥammad, like ʿAlī, was in a category separate from and far above any royal figure. In Shiʿi Najaf court ceremonial appeared, at least to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, to be carefully replicated. In the tomb of the Prophet a set of rituals of access and seclusion, similar to but ultimately distinct from that of earthly sultans, evoked the power of rulership but presented different patterns of both association and separation between the holy and the temporal.

In Najaf the eunuchs were only one group within the retinue of the

dead yet ever-present imam ʿAlī. The sanctuary of Madina also had numerous functionaries, including the *farrashūn*, the non-eunuch servitors, some of whom were freed slaves of the eunuchs. These individuals were responsible for the more menial tasks associated with maintaining the sanctuary complex. Their office was highly respected. But the eunuchs of Madina were the sole guardians of the Prophet's tomb, a pattern that was reflected in a number of royal Mamluk tomb complexes.

The period of the greatest expansion of the Egyptian-based royal endowments of the eunuch society of Madina, under the Qalāwūnid dynasty in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, was also the period in which the Mamluk sultans, the "servants of the two sanctuaries" (i.e., Mecca and Madina), were establishing large eunuch societies in their own tombs in Cairo. The early Mamluk period was also the time when these same sultans patronized Egyptian poets such as al-Būṣīrī and Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd. Their verses in praise of the Prophet reflected a new, affective devotion, a "longing for the *ḥaram*" of the Beloved of God, a physical desire for proximity to the Blessed Chamber, the tomb that housed his uncorrupted body, a constant source of charisma (*baraka*) and blessings. The tomb of the Prophet was "the Tomb," and the ritual visit to it was *al-ziyāra*, "the Visit," a ritual that Ibn Taymiyya feared was replacing the prescribed pilgrimage to the Kaʿba in Mecca.[75]

Despite Ibn Taymiyya's concerns, neither the Mamluk sultans nor their subjects neglected the sanctuary of Mecca and the rites of pilgrimage. The sanctuary of the Prophet (*al-ḥaram al-nabawī*) in Madina, however, appears to have held a place in the religious imagination of many medieval Muslims which, in affective terms at least, did at times rival that of the Kaʿba. By the time such prominent fifteenth-century Cairene scholars as al-Samhūdī and al-Sakhāwī were devoting themselves to treatises on the exaltation or "preferring" of Madina (*tafḍīl al-madīna*), the Prophet's tomb stands out as the charismatic center of the Mamluk Empire.

The Mamluk sultans devoted unprecedented resources to the physical structure of the Prophet's *ḥaram*, the mosque and tomb complex, and Madina, like Mecca, became an important center of *jiwār* for religious scholars, as well as for ordinary people who sought the proximity of holiness as *mujāwirūn*. *Jiwār*, a word that is exceptionally difficult to translate, has the sense of taking up residence in a holy area. The

mujāwirūn of Madina were "neighbors" of the Prophet, and, in a very ancient, even pre-Islamic sense of the word, his protected clients. The sanctuaries of Palestine, Jerusalem, and Hebron, although they never achieved the importance of Madina, were also sites of ritual visitation (*ziyāra*) and of pious residence (*jiwār*). Like Madina and Mecca, these two sanctuary cities also benefited from the patronage of the Mamluk ruling elite.[76]

The tomb of Qalāwūn, the architecture of which is strikingly similar to that of the Dome of the Rock, replicates in many ways the sanctuaries of both Madina and Jerusalem. Al-Maqrīzī's description of the eunuchs who resided within its glittering marble interior (the walls and floor were a masterpiece of the art of inlay) and who allowed "no stranger to enter" echoes descriptions of the eunuch society of Madina:

> It is one of the greatest of the royal buildings and the highest in its standing. Inside it is the tomb which contains al-Malik al-Nāṣir Sayf al-Dīn Qalāwūn and his son al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn and al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn. The interior contains a noble courtyard [*qāʿa*] in the middle of which is a fountain to which water flows from faucets . . . and the rest of this *qāʿa* is adorned with colored marble. This *qāʿa* is the place of residence of the royal eunuchs [*al-khuddām al-mulūkiyya*] who are known today in the Turkish dynasty as *ṭawāshiya* . . . and these eunuchs receive every day a portion of good bread and cooked meat and every month generous salaries on which they grow wealthy. I have seen these eunuchs, and they had great honor [*ḥurma*] and authority and were held in high respect. Their shaykh was counted among the leading notables. He would sit on his high bench and the other eunuchs would be seated in their places and would not cease from their pious acts of devotion. In the past, only the greatest of the sultan's eunuchs would be appointed to the posts in this service, and they would set up in their place deputies who would continuously reside in the tomb. And with the ease of their circumstances and the abundance of their wealth—arising from the height of their glory and the perfection of their authority—they saw the [increased] affiliation [of eunuchs] to the tomb of al-Manṣūr [Qalāwūn]. Then the situation degenerated somewhat in comparison to what it had been in the past. The eunuchs are still in this tomb to this day, [however].[77]

In architectural terms, Sultan Ḥasan went one step further than his grandfather, Qalāwūn. Ḥasan also made provisions for a society of

eunuch guardians for his magnificent tomb. Unlike his grandfather, he did not place his domed tomb off to the side of the mosque area of his complex but situated it directly behind the *qibla,* the niche in every mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca. Thus, when the believers, facing the *qibla,* fulfilled their ritual obligation of prayer five times a day on the marble floors of the mosque of Sultan Ḥasan, they were not only praying in the direction of the Kaʿba but were also prostrating themselves before the dead sultan, surrounded by his eunuchs, as they would have done before his living presence.[78]

The tombs of the Mamluk sultans evoke a broad spectrum of related images: household, palace, sanctuary. The societies of eunuch tomb guardians established by these sultans and by some of their relatives and followers resonate most powerfully with Madina and with the sepulchre of the Prophet. The establishment of eunuch guardians in the tombs of the Mamluk kings of Egypt served, at least on one level of meaning, to mirror the Prophet's tomb in Madina and thus to establish a ceremonial axis between Cairo and the Hijaz, between Sultan and Prophet.

2

Madina: Sultan and Prophet

Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn: The Obscure Founders

The sultan who first placed the eunuchs within the walls of the great mosque of Madina changed the ceremonial topography of the sanctuary. The tomb of the Prophet became a royal household. Just as a corps of eunuchs, themselves symbols of royal authority, controlled access to the sultan and to his family, the eunuchs of the sanctuary would guard the chamber that was both the Prophet's tomb and, in his lifetime, the most intimate area of his household, the residence of his favorite wife.

When individual Mamluk scholars attempted to construct a linear account of the eunuch society of Madina, they sought to locate its precise historic origin in the actions of a particular sultan. They agreed that the eunuch society came into being at some point in the sixth/twelfth century. But they differed on the identity of the sultan who was the founder of this society. The candidates were two historic figures: Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, both powerful sultans and champions of Sunni Islam. Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Zankī, ruler of Syria and Palestine from 541/1146 until 569/1174, had been a victorious commander in his many battles against both the Christian Crusaders and the Shiʿi Fatimids. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, the Saladin of European accounts, was the onetime lieutenant and protégé of Nūr al-Dīn. After occupying Egypt and bringing an end to the Fatimid's Shiʿi empire, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had established his own Egyptian-based dynasty (the

Ayyubids), built the Cairo Citadel, and achieved lasting fame by defeating the Crusaders at the battle of Hittin in 583/1187 and restoring Jerusalem to Muslim rule.

From the fourteenth through the early twentieth century, these two sultans alternately figure in competing Muslim accounts of the origin of the eunuch society of Madina, the guardians of the Prophet's tomb. Individual Mamluk authors endeavored to create a coherent narrative of the founding of the society—a narrative with one point of origin and one sultan. But the fifteenth-century Egyptian scholar al-Sakhāwī, author of one of the most important prosopographical studies of Madina, was painfully aware of the ambiguous and elusive nature of his subject. In this work, *al-Tuḥfa al-laṭīfa bi-akhbār al-balad al-sharīfa* (The charming gift containing the histories of the Noble City), Al-Sakhāwī attempted a recovery of the biographical layers of the sanctuary of Madina from the time of the Prophet and his companions up to and including al-Sakhāwī's own era.[79]

In al-Sakhāwī's painstaking discussion of the twelfth-century information on the eunuch society, the eunuchs themselves, the obvious informants, are notably absent. Like most of the Mamluk scholars who wrote about Madina, al-Sakhāwī had close personal contacts with the eunuchs of the Prophet and cited individual eunuchs as authoritative sources for other episodes in the history of the sanctuary. But on the subject of their origins the eunuchs, stubbornly silent, had no voice in the writings of their contemporaries.

The two conflicting versions of the foundation of the eunuch society manifest certain common themes: the role of strong Sunni sultans who are themselves represented as having a close personal relationship to the dead Prophet; the description of the eunuchs as both ceremonial "guards" and "servants" of the Prophet; the connection between the royal eunuchs at the political center (wherever that may be) and the eunuchs of the Prophet; and, most important, the prestige and power attached to the eunuchs' presence. In both versions the founders, Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, are figures who also appear in Mamluk texts as models for reigning Mamluk sultans.[80]

No matter which sultan they chose as the authentic founder of the society of eunuchs, none of the Mamluk authors who wrote about Madina attempted to present an origin for that society earlier than the twelfth century. When, as modern readers, we enter into al-Sakhāwī's fifteenth-century account of the eunuchs of the Prophet and look over

his shoulder, as it were, at the earlier accounts which he collected, the eunuchs themselves appear briefly, in passing, with little discussion of their institutional structure and no reference to their origins.

The Search for Origins

When the Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr visited Madina in 580/1184, he described a group of eunuch guardians in the mosque of the Prophet:

> On the eastern side [of the tomb] is an arbor made of aloe wood. This is the place where some of the guardians who watch over the blessed mosque spend the night. The guardians are Ethiopian and Slavic eunuchs. They present an elegant appearance and are meticulous in their clothing and bearing.[81]

Ibn al-Najjār of Baghdad, whose youthful "Book of the Precious Pearl on the History of Madina" would become an authoritative source for subsequent accounts of the City of the Prophet, visited Madina and composed his history in 595/1198, some fourteen years after Ibn Jubayr. His book, however, is not a description of travels but a history and topography of the sanctuary, and gives scant attention to the eunuchs of the Prophet. He mentions in passing that "Bayān, the black eunuch, one of the eunuchs/servitors of the mosque," entered the Prophet's tomb in 554/1159.[82] Another traveler, the North African Ibn al-ʿĀt, recorded a similar incident involving a eunuch, the pious Badr al-Ḍaʿīf ("Badr the Weak"—that is, weak from fasting and prayer). This incident supposedly took place in 570/1174, some forty years before Ibn al-ʿĀt's visit to Madina.[83] For al-Sakhāwī, in his search for origins, these two references are important markers for dating the beginnings of the eunuch society of Madina. But al-Sakhāwī's colleague, the jurist al-Samhūdī, in his discussion of the history of the Prophet's tomb, points out that Ibn al-Najjār fails to mention the second incident, involving Badr al-Ḍaʿīf. Unlike his friend al-Sakhāwī, al-Samhūdī confesses that he is not comfortable with the two accounts and suspects that they refer to a single event.[84]

In Ibn Jubayr's account of the elegant eunuchs whom he saw in the sanctuary of Madina, he calls them *sadana*, a word commonly translated as "guardians" but which has connotations not simply of the guarding but of the veiling and secluding of something holy. It was and is the word applied to the custodians of the Kaʿba as well as to the

custodians of other pre-Islamic shrines.[85] Ibn Jubayr's text seems to be one of the few twelfth-century descriptions of the eunuchs of the Prophet. The heightened visibility of these eunuchs in later Mamluk sources parallels a change in their status. The difference between Ibn Jubayr's description of the eunuch society and that of the North African traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa almost two hundred years later is significant.

After thirty years of travels that included all of the Mamluk Empire and several sojourns in the holy cities, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa returned to Morocco in 754/1353 and began dictating the history of his voyages to the scholar Ibn Juzayy. The *Riḥla* (Voyage), completed in 756/1357, appropriates the *Voyage* of Ibn Jubayr and uses it as a kind of base text for Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's own narrative. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, or Ibn Juzayy, manipulates the earlier text, altering its form and sentiment and adding layers of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's own memories. When he describes the eunuchs of the Prophet's sanctuary, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa redraws Ibn Jubayr's twelfth-century portrait of elegant, orderly figures in much the same language as his predecessor. But he adds significant observations which are firmly grounded in his own fourteenth-century experience. Ibn Jubayr, writing long before the Mamluk transformation of the sanctuary of the Prophet, noticed the eunuchs' beauty. What Ibn Baṭṭūṭa saw was their wealth and power:

> The servitors of this noble mosque and its custodians are eunuchs from among the Ethiopians and such like. They present a handsome appearance, they have a clean, meticulous look, and their clothes are elegant. Their chief is known as the *shaykh al-khuddām,* and he has the position of one of the grand amirs. They have stipends in the lands of Egypt and Syria which are brought to them every year.[86]

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was not a historian. As he wanders across continents in his *Voyage,* the ambiguities of constructing and reconstructing historical narratives do not trouble him. For the self-proclaimed Mamluk historians of Madina such as al-Sakhāwī, such ambiguities were a source of anxiety. For al-Sakhāwī the eunuchs of the Prophet needed a founder with an identity and a place in time. The sixth/twelfth century as a place in time made good sense. If the twentieth-century reader, like al-Sakhāwī, must locate an origin and a founder for the eunuchs, the twelfth century and a Nūr al-Dīn or a Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn still make sense.

One can argue that the twelfth century was the period in which the figure of the Prophet Muḥammad as Intercessor began to be articulated among Sunni Muslims with a heightened language of both intimacy and

veneration. It was also a period in which strong sultans were in open competition with a revived caliphate. Given the most obvious area of conflict—the claim of the caliph as the deputy of the Prophet to supreme political and moral authority in the Islamic world—it is not surprising that the struggle for prestige should include the holy cities. In theory the caliph was the protector of Mecca and Madina, but the very title *khādim al-ḥaramayn* (servant of the Two Sanctuaries) appears to have been created as a sultan's title by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, to whom the founding of the eunuch society is so often attributed.[87] In Madina the residence of the chief eunuch, which stood at the entrance of the eunuch quarter adjacent to the Gate of Gabriel of the *ḥaram*, also housed the tombs of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's father, Ayyūb, and his uncle Shirkūh. Adjoining this structure stood the hospice and tomb of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, the vizier of the other reputed founder of the eunuch society, Nūr al-Dīn.[88]

Almost two hundred years after the deaths of Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, most of the pious scholars who constructed a past for the eunuch society of Madina favored Ṣalāḥ al-Din in the role of founder. Like Nūr al-Dīn, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had been transformed into a semi-mythical figure, an idealized Muslim ruler and holy warrior. But he was also the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, the Egyptian-based empire from which the early Mamluk sultans claimed both succession and legitimacy. The first powerful Mamluk rulers, Baybars and Qalāwūn, freed slaves of the last effective Ayyubid sultan, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, had consistently presented themselves as the true heirs to their master's empire. Biographers of Sultan Baybars carefully constructed significant parallels between the life of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's ancestor Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and that of his former slave, Baybars.

In the parallel tradition, however, Nūr al-Dīn, a figure also invested with ideal qualities of sovereignty and piety, was closely linked with the city of Madina and with the Prophet himself. A legend, widely disseminated in the Mamluk period, identifies Nūr al-Dīn as the personal champion of the Prophet, singled out by the Messenger of God to save his tomb from desecration.

According to the story, the sultan was sleeping one night in his palace in Aleppo during the year 557/1168 when the Prophet appeared to him in a disturbing dream. The Messenger of God pointed out two fair-haired men and said: "O, Maḥmūd! Come to my aid! Save me from these two!" Three times that night the sultan awoke startled and agitated

by this same dream. Before dawn he summoned his trusted vizier Jamāl al-Dīn[89] and related the dream to him. The latter chided him: "So why are you sitting here? There is something transpiring in the City of the Prophet which only you can stop!" The story proceeds from there, in its variant versions, with gathering suspense and twists of plot, as Nūr al-Dīn and his vizier ride off to Madina (in some versions with a great army, in others before daybreak with only twenty men) to conduct their investigation.

The two fair-haired men of the dream turn out to be Christian saboteurs, sent to Madina in the disguise of Andalusian pilgrims by unidentified Christian kings. So convincing is the outward piety of these men that when Nūr al-Dīn identifies them as the individuals in his dream, no one, not even the vizier, believes him.

The narrative, in an interesting inversion of the normal hierarchy, presents the sultan as trapped and impotent, condemned by the very power of his vision to be disregarded by those around him. He is himself in a kind of prophetic role, a Noah whose warnings fall on deaf ears. In order to save the Prophet and restore his own authority, Nūr al-Dīn must play the role of the detective and, through his Holmesian investigation, persuade his fellow Muslims of the true identity of the fair-haired men. After a tense interval he succeeds. The vizier and the horrified residents of Madina finally realize that the choice of residence of the two "pilgrims"—outside the southeast section of the wall of the sanctuary, closest to the tomb—was not, as they had believed, based on a pious desire for proximity to the Prophet. From this place, Nūr al-Dīn demonstrates, the saboteurs had been secretly digging an underground tunnel into the sanctuary in order to violate the sepulchre and carry off the body of the Messenger of God. The two spies confess. Nūr al-Dīn reassumes his proper role as all-powerful sultan. He has the two Christians executed outside the sanctified boundaries of the City of the Prophet. The sultan orders that a deep protective trench be dug around the tomb. He then has the ditch filled with molten lead. Before departing from Madina, the pious ruler also orders the rebuilding and expansion of the walls of the city.[90]

The attempted kidnapping of the Prophet's body, and often of the bodies of the first two rightly guided caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, is a frequent topos in Sunni literature on the history of the Prophet's tomb. The would-be body snatchers, however, are usually Shiʿi agents, not Christians. In a late Mamluk version of the Nūr al-Dīn story, the two

Christians are collapsed into a single Shiʿi.[91] The most detailed text of the earlier version appears in a fourteenth-century anti-Christian tract titled "The Islamic Victories," with the subheading "The Principal Reason for Opposing the Employment of Christian scribes."[92]

Coptic scribes and wealthy convert families in the civilian bureaucracy are frequent targets of Muslim anger in Mamluk sources. Like the two "fair-haired men," the Coptic converts to Islam are often presented as outwardly pious but inwardly evil and subversive. And just as the presence of the "fair-haired men" in the story of Nūr al-Dīn and a general blindness among Muslims lead to the sultan's temporary loss of power and to disruption of the moral and political order, so do the Christian and formerly Christian officials in the Mamluk chronicles play the role of agents of deception and disruption.

The legend of the two saboteurs is not recorded by Nūr al-Dīn's contemporary biographers, a fact that greatly disturbed al-Samhūdī, who wrote:

> I find it strange that I have not found this story in the texts of the biographies of Nūr al-Dīn—despite its significance. For this story serves as witness to what al-Imām al-Yāfiʿ says in his biography of Nūr al-Dīn that Nūr al-Dīn . . . was one of the forty saints and that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was his deputy among the three hundred saints.[93]

Al-Samhūdī might well have wondered similarly about Nūr al-Dīn's supposed founding of the eunuch society. Although Nūr al-Dīn made the pilgrimage to the Kaʿba and the ritual visit to the Prophet's tomb in 556/1161, his contemporary biographers make no mention of the Christian spies, the ditch filled with molten lead, or the founding of the eunuch society. What may have been uppermost in the minds of Muslims in the twelfth century was not the perceived threat of Christian converts but the external threat of the Crusaders.

The raiding expeditions of Reynaud of Chatillon in the Red Sea in the 570s/1180s constituted a very real Christian threat to the City of the Prophet. The Crusaders boasted that they would burn the Prophet's mosque and carry off his body—or so Muslim sources reported. In 578/1183 Reynaud sacked the port of ʿAydhāb, from which pilgrims embarked for Jidda, and landed a raiding party in Yanbūʿ, only a few days' march from Madina.[94] Although the Crusaders were eventually driven back to their ships by reinforcements sent by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, their near-penetration of the Two Sanctuaries was undoubtedly a shock to

twelfth-century Muslims. It is only in nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources, however, that the Christian threat, whether of the legendary "fair-haired men" of Nūr al-Dīn's dream or of Reynaud's expedition, is directly linked with the founding of the eunuch society and with the eunuchs' role as guards of the tomb.[95] In a similar legend involving a Shiʿi attempt to desecrate the Prophet's grave, the chief eunuch plays a major role—but not as the physical defender of the Prophet. He is instead the righteous witness who observes, unharmed, while the earth miraculously opens and swallows the Shiʿi agents.[96]

What is significant about the Mamluk scholars' presentation of Nūr al-Dīn's double connection with the tomb—as the champion of the Prophet and as the founder of the eunuch society—is that in both cases he is portrayed as increasing the barriers, real and symbolic, around the tomb of the Prophet.

It was Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, however, who was most commonly portrayed as the founder of the eunuch society in Mamluk and post-Mamluk sources. The society's strong economic ties with Egypt—ties that were quite evident in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—undoubtedly gave the Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn version a certain validity in the eyes of contemporaries. The oldest endowment for the society, and for centuries the source of its core income, was the profit generated by agricultural land in Egypt: specifically the village of Sindbīs in the Delta and the village of Naqqāda in Upper Egypt. According to the topographer Ibn Duqmāq (d. 809/1406), Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn placed one third of Sindbīs and all of Naqqāda into an endowment for twenty-four perpetual positions for eunuch guardians at the Prophet's tomb. Then, in 740/1340, the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, the son of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the grandson of Sultan Qalāwūn, placed the remaining two thirds of Sindbīs into an endowment for the eunuchs and created sixteen new positions, thus raising the official number of the eunuchs of the Prophet to forty. In Ibn Duqmāq's time the eunuchs had built a waterwheel and a sugar press in Sindbīs to augment their revenues and had assigned a eunuch from among their number to supervise the entire operation.[97] Elsewhere Sindbīs is described as the source of revenue for the embroidered covering (*kiswa*) of the Prophet's tomb and for the embroidered covering of the Kaʿba.[98]

These two villages were so closely identified with the eunuch society that a provincial scribe in the Ottoman administration of Madina, Kātib ʿAlī Efendi, describing his native city in the year 1898, refers to the

eunuchs of the Prophet's sanctuary as being divided into two "teams" for lighting the lamps in the mosque at night: "One is called Naqqāda and one is called Sindbīs, and each has its assigned area." Kātib ʿAlī does not seem to be aware that the names refer to the villages in Egypt that were the eunuchs' original sources of revenue.[99]

By the 1490s, when al-Sakhāwī was writing his chapter "on the eunuchs [*fī'l-khuddām*]" in his great biographical/topographical compendium on Madina, "The Charming Gift on the History of the Noble City," a work undertaken at the suggestion of his friend and colleague al-Samhūdī, the actual circumstances surrounding the founding of the society were, to his critical eye, veiled in obscurity. In the course of his long periods of retreat (*jiwār*)[100] in Madina, during which he had often given lectures on prophetic traditions in the sanctuary itself, al-Sakhāwī had come to know the eunuchs of the Prophet quite well. During his first retreat he had lived in a house near Bāb Jibrīl, the Gate of Gabriel of the sanctuary, close to the official residence of the chief eunuch and to the eunuch quarter of the city.[101] In al-Sakhāwī's other biographical work, "The Shining Light on the Notable People of the Ninth Century," a number of the eunuchs of Madina appear as his students, regular attendants at his lectures in the *rawḍa* (garden) of the Prophet, adjacent to the tomb itself.[102] Despite this personal familiarity with the eunuch society and an extensive knowledge of the local histories of Madina, al-Sakhāwī was himself uncertain about the origins of the society.

First al-Sakhāwī briefly describes the eunuch society in his own time. There are forty or more eunuchs, he says, from several ethnic groups: *Hindī* (i.e., from the Indian subcontinent); *Takrūrī* (West African); *Rūmī* (Greek or Balkan, possibly from the non-Muslim frontiers of Anatolia); and *Ḥabashī* (Ethiopian or East African).[103] The *Hindī*, he says, make up the majority in his own time. Al-Sakhāwī then presents his readers with the references to the society which he has found in earlier sources. He admits, however, that he himself is not sure that his oldest piece of evidence actually refers to a eunuch. The source in question is an anecdote from an earlier transmitter, Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1106). Al-Sakhāwī does not give the anecdote in its entirety but only mentions that it involves a person described as a *khādim* who strikes a man who stands before the Prophet's tomb and gives the call to prayer: "If the possibility did not exist that the individual in question was not a eunuch [*khaṣī*]—in spite of his zeal—then this anecdote would be the earliest evidence we have found on the subject of their antiquity."[104]

For al-Sakhāwī this is an uncharacteristic retreat from a text. His uneasy language and conscious omission of the details of the story reflect a number of contemporary concerns, historiographic and political. In the original account, in Ibn ʿAsākir's biography of the traditionalist Thābit ibn Aḥmad al-Baghdādī, the *khādim* is the villain:

> He [Thābit ibn Aḥmad] saw a man in the City of the Prophet who was giving the morning call to prayer at the tomb of the Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him. He [the man] said in the course of the call to pray, "Prayer is better than sleep." A *khādim* from among the *khuddām* of the Prophet's tomb slapped him in the face when he heard that. The muezzein burst into tears and said, "O, Prophet of God, are such deeds done in your presence [*fī haḍratika*]?" The *khādim* was immediately struck down and was carried to his home. He survived for three days and then died.[105]

Thābit ibn Aḥmad was born in 401/1010 and died shortly after 477/1084, at least fifty years before Nūr al-Dīn came to power in Syria. This account, if accepted by al-Sakhāwī and his contemporaries, would have called into question the existing narratives that figured one or the other of the twelfth-century heroes, Nūr al-Dīn or Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, as the founder of the eunuch society. On some level, by even including a reference to the anecdote, this is what al-Sakhāwī was doing. For it was the representation of the eunuch's character, not the chronology of this story, which was problematic for al-Sakhāwī's own literary account of the eunuch society.

Eunuchs generally were considered to be frail creatures, but this frailty did not preclude their use of physical violence. The biographies of the eunuchs of the Prophet often describe them as inspiring *mahāba*—a respect bordering on dread—but this is clearly the product of qualities that have little to do with physical strength.[106] Although the eunuchs of the Prophet are sometimes referred to as the "guards" of the tomb in the stories of their founding, they were clearly not perceived as guards in any defensive sense. Nonetheless, here, as in other spheres, their neutrality endows them with power and with an immunity from physical threats.[107] In their role as the ceremonial guardians of the tomb, the eunuchs often struck individuals whom they considered to have offended the sacred honor of the Prophet, and who, for the most part, dared not return the blows.

The problem with this particular eunuch was not his violence but his religious and political sympathies. The muezzin gives the Sunni call to

prayer, the eunuch slaps him, and the eunuch is miraculously struck down by the Prophet. The implication is that the eunuch, like the ruling elite of Madina, the Shiʿi amirs, has joined forces with the "people of evil," the Shiʿi population of the city. In "The Precious Gift on the History of Madina," al-Sakhāwī drew on a variety of sources, including the work of Ibn Farḥūn, to present a corpus of biographies in which the eunuchs of the Prophet are presented as superheroes of Sunni piety in the struggle for Sunni dominance in the City of the Prophet. A muezzin-slapping pro-Shiʿi eunuch did not fit comfortably into such an account.

Al-Sakhāwī must have known, however, that any of his scholarly contemporaries would have had access to the works of Ibn ʿAsākir. His friend al-Samhūdī included the complete account of the slapped muezzin and the miraculous punishment of the eunuch in the section of his own book on Madina in which he discussed miracles that occurred at the Prophet's tomb.[108] Al-Sakhāwī, however, was able to circumvent such learned readers by playing on the ambiguity of the term *khādim*.

Until the Ottoman period the eunuchs of the Prophet were consistently referred to in Arabic sources as the *khuddām*, their leader as the *shaykh al-khuddām* or *shaykh al-ḥaram*, and their residential quarter as the *ḥārat al-khuddām*. The word *khādim* literally means "servant," and the eunuchs were indeed the "servants" of the Prophet. A eunuch who joined the society was described as having entered "the noble service" (*al-khidma al-sharīfa*). *Khādim* was also, however, a common euphemism for "eunuch," the word *khaṣī* (castrated one) being rarely used, and was current as early as the ninth century. By the Mamluk period it was the most common term for "eunuch," followed only by *ṭawāshī*.[109]

After the Ottoman annexation of the Hijaz, writers in Arabic often referred to the eunuchs collectively as *al-aghawāt*, from the respectful title *agha* (lord) with which they were addressed, and the *ḥārat al-khuddām* became the *ḥārat al-aghawāt*. In Ottoman usage *khādim* also continued to mean "eunuch." But neither term ever lost its original meaning, and, as with the common use of the term "boy" for male slave, ubiquitous in Arabic as well as in a number of western languages, both ancient and modern, the person signified by *agha* or *khādim* was determined by the context.[110]

Al-Sakhāwī concludes his observations with the rather ambivalent statement "but, in any case, they were not formerly as numerous [as they are now]." He seems to settle, although not wholeheartedly, on the Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn version, since he quotes a passage taken from the Mad-

inan scholar Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn (d. 774/1372), whose biographies of individual eunuchs, copied verbatim by al-Sakhāwī, form a kind of hagiographic corpus on the eunuchs of the Prophet:

> Then I [al-Sakhāwī] saw that Ibn Farḥūn said the following: "It was al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yusūf ibn Ayyūb who established the order of the eunuchs [*thabata qaʿidat al-khuddām*] in the Prophet's sanctuary. He settled endowments on them, and the deed of endowment is in their hands to this day. The provisions of the endowment were for twenty specified eunuchs and after them to the eunuchs of the Prophet's sanctuary. . . . And from the date in which they were established with a *jamākiya* [an official salary from the sultan], they have been in sanctuary for two hundred years," that is, dating up to the time of Ibn Farḥūn.[111]

Ibn Farḥūn's text provided al-Sakhāwī with a coherent, linear account of the founding of the eunuch society. But al-Sakhāwī's own uneasy language and his attempt to find material on the eunuch society which predates the twelfth century militate against a fixed point of origin.

Unlike the historically minded al-Sakhāwī, the fourteenth-century scribe al-Qalqashandī in his reference work for government officials simply stated that the office of the shaykh of the Prophet's sanctuary was traditionally held by a eunuch. This position, which was one of the most powerful in Madina, rivaling even that of the amir of the city, was combined with the position of chief eunuch—except for a brief hiatus under the late Mamluks—until the mid-nineteenth century, when the title *shaykh al-ḥaram* was given to a non-eunuch Ottoman official.[112]

For al-Qalqashandī the equation of *shaykh al-ḥaram* and *shaykh al-khuddām* was unquestioned: "It has been the custom [*qad jarā al-ʿāda*] that this office should go to a eunuch [*khādim*] from among the castrated males [*min al-khiṣyān*] who are referred to as *ṭawāshiya,* meaning by that 'those from the doors of the sultan.'"[113] Al-Qalqashandī did not find it necessary to explain the office itself or its origin. He did explicate the term *ṭawāshiya,* which—although commonly used like *khādim/khuddām* as a synonym for *khiṣyān*—apparently, for some authors, had the connotation of "high-ranking eunuch," or, as al-Maqrīzī defined it, "royal eunuchs" (*al-khuddām al-mulūkiyya*).[114]

In 839/1435, when Sultan Barsbay appointed Wāliy al-Dīn Abū al-Yaman Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, whom al-Maqrīzī described derisively as "the jester drinking companion of the sultan," to the post of chief eunuch in place of the eunuch Bashīr al-Tanamī, it was perceived as a violation of *sunna* (existing tradition) that a *faḥl* (an uncastrated male)

should hold this office. The reaction was extremely negative. Al-Maqrīzī wrote:

> We have not known the office of the Master of the Prophet's sanctuary [*mashyakat al-ḥaram al-nabawī*] to be held by anyone, since the days of the Sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, who was not from among the eunuchs [*al-khuddām al-ṭawāshiya*]. The government of this Ibn Qāsim was a great misfortune and a trial which was inflicted on the people of the Two Sanctuaries.[115]

Within three years Ibn Qāsim had been replaced by a eunuch, Shāhīn al-Sāqī.[116] In 880/1474 Sultan Qa'itbay gave the position to the "first Turkish [i.e., military] *faḥl*," Aynal Shaykh al-Isḥāqī al-Ẓāhirī Jaqmaq, who was very unpopular in the sanctuary because of his harsh treatment of the jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*).[117] The chronicler Ibn Iyās would indignantly maintain that the office had gone to a eunuch "from ancient times [*min qadīm al-zamān*]." No reason is given, however, for this *sunna*.[118] For al-Qalqashandī, as for most Mamluk authors, it was enough that it was the custom (*ʿādat*).

Al-Sakhāwī had simply stated that the eunuch's right and obligation to spend the night (*mabīt*) inside the sanctuary after all other believers had been expelled "was the original reason for their [the eunuchs'] creation."[119] For al-Sakhāwī, as for his audience, it would appear that the symbolic value of the eunuchs was self-evident. Not only was it consistent with the "glorification of the Prophet" that the individuals who were the "servants of the Prophet of God" (*khuddām rasūl allāh*) should also be eunuchs (*khuddām*) but it was also appropriate that the people who would spend the night adjacent to the Prophet, a powerful and very active charismatic presence even after his death, would belong to that category of beings who were physically constructed to act as mediators of boundaries.

In the post-Mamluk discussions of the eunuchs of the Prophets, the same traditions regarding their origins are preserved, although with some variations. The equation between their office in the sanctuary and their status as eunuchs is still taken for granted. The seventeenth-century Madinan scholar al-ʿAbbāsī wrote:

> As for what Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn introduced [*aḥdatha*], the appointment of eunuchs to the noble presence out of reverence for the holy place and to glorify its exalted position. He put into endowment a splendid village named Naqqāda on the banks of the Nile for twenty-four eunuchs and he made their office the service of the noble tomb.[120]

In an eighteenth-century version of the founding of the society by Nūr al-Dīn, related by the scholar Khayr al-Dīn Ilyās al-Madanī (d. 1134/1721), it is in fact the eunuchs of Nūr al-Dīn's court who come up with the original plan for the society and are responsible for bringing it into existence:

> They [the society] first came into being toward the end of the dynasty of the Kurds [Ayyubids] in the days of the martyr Nūr al-Dīn through the mediation of some of the eunuchs who were in his service. They strove for this goal and obtained the support of one of the viziers. The sultan agreed and appointed twelve eunuchs from among them and made it a condition of their appointment that they be reciters of the Book of God and people of ritual piety. They were to be *Ḥabashīs*, and if there were no *Ḥabashīs* then *Rūmīs*, then *Takrūrīs*, then *Hindīs*. They continued according to this for some time, but the condition [i.e., of their being *Ḥabashī*] was discontinued until the majority of them were *Hindīs*.[121]

One of the most interesting details of this Nūr al-Dīn version, the role played by the eunuchs themselves, undoubtedly reflects the powerful axis between the eunuchs of the Prophet and the eunuchs of the sultan's court, a connection that first appears under the Mamluks when Madina became the symbolic center of a larger eunuch network, and that persists under the Ottomans.

In the Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn version, after defeating the Fatimids and restoring the Hijaz to a nominal Sunni allegiance, the sultan pressures the Banū Ḥusayn, the Shiʿi amirs of Madina, into allowing him to appoint twenty-four eunuchs to the Prophet's sanctuary:

> Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was the author of many good deeds and among them was the appointment of the *aghawāt* in the City of the Prince, the son of ʿAdnān, and before this there was not one eunuch there. The reason for their appointment was that after the Fatimids were defeated, he [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn] gave the Banū Ḥusayn money and pressured them until they allowed him to appoint twenty-four of the *aghawāt* and he put a shaykh over them from among the eunuchs named Badr al-Asadī. He placed in endowment for the [eunuch] residents of Madina two villages in the province of Upper Egypt: Naqqāda and Qayyāla. When the *shaykh al-ḥaram* came before the kings, they would stand up for him and have him be seated by their side, and they would gain *baraka* from him because of the closeness of his covenant [ʿ*ahd*] to those noble places.[122]

Al-Barzanjī, recently arrived in Madina in 1854 and confused by the fact that his source presented two contradictory versions, concluded that there must be "an error of the copyist" involved, and proposed as a compromise version that Nūr al-Dīn established the society and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn expanded it. Like al-ʿAbbāsī's account, his presumes that the presence of eunuchs is a *taʿẓīm,* a "glorification" of the Prophet and of his tomb, and that their establishment is one of the *maʾāthir ḥusna,* or lasting good deeds, of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.[123] The honoring of the Prophet extends to the eunuchs themselves because of their quality of "closeness" to the ultimate source of *baraka,* the Prophet's body.

Fire, Sword, and Ceremony: The Changing Space of the Tomb

Within a broader context, the arrival of the eunuchs, whose very presence created a new boundary around the tomb, was another stage in the multiplication of barriers between the "presence" of the dead Prophet and the Muslims, a trend that had begun almost immediately after the Prophet's death. The difficulty of any kind of reconstruction of the architectural history of the tomb is due in part to a certain sense of religious ambiguity about looking on the actual grave of the Prophet or entering into its physical proximity.

The sanctuary of the Prophet—although repeatedly enlarged and on several occasions almost completely rebuilt—appears always to have retained its original form of a quadrangle with an open courtyard enclosed on all four sides by rows of pillars. This courtyard (*ṣaḥn* or *ḥawsh*) is held to be the site of the open court of the first mosque of the Muslim community in Madina. Adjoining the mosque was the residence of Muḥammad's family, which—following a fairly typical pattern of large polygynous households—consisted of separate chambers (*ḥujar*), huts of mud and palm branches, for his various wives.[124]

The real locus of power in the sanctuary was, and is, not in the mosque proper but in this household area, in the southeast corner of the sanctuary enclosure, where the structures surrounding the tomb of the Prophet have always stood. By the twelfth century the sanctuary enclosure had been enlarged beyond the original mosque-household area of the Prophet. In the early eighth century the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd had ordered a complete reconstruction of the sanctuary. About

sixty years later the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī further enlarged the mosque. The most highly charged space continued to be the tomb itself and the *rawḍa* (the "Garden"). In accordance with the prophetic tradition, "What is between my house and my pulpit is a garden from among the gardens of paradise," the Garden was held by many Muslims to be a physical piece of paradise present on earth. After the tomb, it was the most venerated space in the *ḥaram:* by day a place of prayer and study, at night the special provenance of the eunuchs and hosts of invisible angels.[125]

Tradition held that the Prophet had been buried where he had died, under the floor of the chamber of his favorite wife, ʿAʾisha. The first caliph, ʿAʾisha's father, Abū Bakr, was then buried next to him. ʿAʾisha continued to live in the tomb, but when ʿUmar, the second caliph, was also buried there, she had a wall built to separate her own living space from the graves, for, as the pious tradition maintains, she would not appear unveiled even before the dead ʿUmar, since he was neither her husband nor her father.[126] After her death the tomb was sealed. One day in 88/706, however, the walls of the tomb collapsed and the graves became partially visible, "and there has never been recorded such a day of lamentation as that one."[127] The then-governor of Madina and future caliph, the pious ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, covered the tomb with a curtain and ordered an engineer to survey its foundations. He then had a doorless hexagonal structure, with walls reaching to the roof of the mosque, built around the original chamber. He left a small aperture (*kūwa*) in the roof, through which he sent his freedman to clear the rubble from the tombs after the new walls had been completed and the original tomb entirely hidden from view.[128] ʿUmar also enlarged the sanctuary and removed the dwellings of Muḥammad's other wives, so that the only *ḥujar* left within the sanctuary were the now enclosed tomb of the Prophet and, directly north of it, the room of Fāṭima, Muḥammad's daughter and the wife of ʿAlī.[129]

From this point on the hexagonal walls of ʿUmar marked a sacred barrier which was not penetrated for the next four hundred years. A silver nail driven into the southern wall of this structure indicated the position of the Prophet's head. The visitor to the tomb stood facing this nail with his back to the wall of the mosque in the space that, according to tradition, was once the alleyway between the chamber of ʿAʾisha and the chamber of her co-wife, Hafṣa.[130]

At some point in the twelfth century the hexagonal structure, now inclusively referred to as "the tomb," was completely covered with a

kiswa (raiment) like that of the Kaʿba.[131] In some accounts ʿImād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, the vizier who figures so prominently in the story of Nūr al-Dīn and the Christian saboteurs, is credited with surrounding the tomb with an ornamental screen of sandalwood.[132] Although Mamluk-period authors such as al-Samhūdī maintain that it was the Mamluk sultans who closed off access to the tomb, the Persian traveler Nasir-i Khusraw, who visited Madina in 439/1048, also mentions a barrier which no one was allowed to pass.[133]

In 548/1153 the people of Madina heard a strange sound from inside the tomb, and they were thrown into a state of consternation. The amir of Madina finally resolved that a "man of piety and righteousness" should be let down into the tomb. The most pious man in Madina was an elderly Sufi shaykh, ʿUmar al-Nasāʾī. At first he refused to undertake the task on the grounds that he suffered from an illness that kept him in an almost constant state of ritual impurity. But, when prevailed upon, he abstained from food and drink for a week and prayed to God to cure his symptoms for the space of time required for him to enter the tomb, to accomplish his task, and to leave. Trusting in God, the shaykh tied a rope around his waist and had himself let down into the tomb from the roof of the mosque. With his bare hands he repaired the fallen stones that had caused the noise. He then cleaned the dust off the Prophet's sepulchre with his long white beard. Miraculously, the symptoms of his illness disappeared before his entry into these holy precincts and reappeared only when he had been pulled up out of the tomb.[134]

ʿUmar al-Nasāʾī's descent into the tomb was the first time since the reconstruction undertaken by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz that anyone had entered the actual tomb chamber. Supposedly, while ʿAʾisha was still alive, a devout woman of Madina had begged to be allowed one glimpse of the Prophet's grave. ʿAʾisha had finally relented, and the woman, upon seeing the grave, began to weep inconsolably and then died.[135] The descriptions of ʿUmar al-Nasāʾī's descent into the tomb make it very clear that this course of action was undertaken with great trepidation. Beyond the concern for ritual purity, the preparations surrounding the shaykh's actual entry have the tone of compensatory rites for the violation of a boundary. Within a few years the eunuchs had become the guardians of that boundary. Not only did they seem to be able to cross over with relative ease into this holy space, which is so highly charged with *baraka* that entry was potentially lethal for most humans, but they could on occasion provide a kind of safe conduct for ordinary Muslims.

Only six years after al-Nasāʾī's descent another crisis occurred. A strange smell began to emanate from the tomb. This time it was a eunuch, "the *ṭawāshī* Bayān, one of the *khuddām* of the noble tomb," who was judged to possess the necessary piety to descend into the space between the two walls and remove the source of the odor, the decaying corpse of a cat, which had fallen into the tomb. His entrance, however, was still not exclusive of *fuḥūl* (non-eunuchs). Bayān took with him the building supervisor of the mosque and a Sufi shaykh, who reportedly bribed the amir of Madina for this privilege.[136]

In 570/1174 the people of Madina again heard a crash inside the tomb. After writing to the caliph in Baghdad, the amir and the pious scholars of Madina decided that the person best suited to enter was the pious eunuch Badr al-Ḍaʿīf, "who fasted by day and kept vigil by night." Badr entered the tomb alone. Finding that part of the original wall of ʿAʾisha's house had fallen down, he repaired it with bricks.[137]

In Ramadan 654/September 1256 the sanctuary of the Prophet burned to the ground. The only part of the mosque to be saved intact was the domed structure in the courtyard, which had been built by the twelfth-century Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh to store the *muṣḥaf ʿuthmānī*, the bloodstained copy of the Qurʾan which the Rightly Guided Caliph ʿUthmān had been reading when he was assassinated. The hexagonal walls of the tomb were also spared, but the debris from the collapsed roof crashed into the interior of the tomb. This time not even the eunuchs attempted repairs, for "no one dared to approach this greatness."[138] Such a project could not have been accomplished from within the tomb but would have required the removal of the exterior walls, and this, as al-Samhūdī points out, would have been a desecration (*intihāk al-ḥurma*).[139]

The impact of this disaster, both on the people of Madina and on the Muslim community at large, was doubly felt because of the embattled circumstances of the "House of Islam" at this time. Less than a year earlier, Möngke Khan had begun the second and greatest Mongol offensive into the Middle East, and the Mongol armies, having devastated the Iranian plateau, were advancing undefeated into Iraq under the command of the great Khan's brother Hülegü. After the fire the amir of Madina had consulted with the leading eunuchs and resident scholars and had decided to turn for aid to the figure who was still perceived as the ultimate spiritual authority in the Muslim community, the caliph, the Prophet's deputy on earth. Promises of money and men to rebuild the sanctuary had come from Baghdad. Before those promises could be

fulfilled, however, Baghdad itself was in flames, and the last caliph, al-Mustaʿṣim, had been executed by the Mongols along with most of his family.

The accidental conflagration which had destroyed the sanctuary of the Prophet was linked in the popular consciousness with the fires of the Mongol conquest and became, in retrospect, one of the portents of that calamity. Only three months prior to the destruction of the mosque, a flow of lava, recorded by the chroniclers as "the fire of the Hijaz," had spread flames across much of the land east of Madina. The city and the sanctuary were spared. At the time this was seen as a miracle of the Prophet, who would not allow flames to touch his sanctuary. A series of eclipses of the sun and moon, however, continued to discompose the believers.[140] In that same year a terrible flood had submerged much of Baghdad, destroying over 380 homes.[141] In beleagured Damascus Abū Shāma (d. 665/1266) reported blood on the sun, tremors in the earth, and a strange disembodied voice like thunder which howled in the streets of the city hour after hour. Abū Shāma, who would live to see the fall of Damascus to the Mongols, wrote in retrospect: "The occurrence of this external fire and the burning of the mosque must be counted among the signs [*ayāt*]. It was as if they were a warning of the punishment that would be visited on God's creatures."[142]

These Sunni texts, constructed after the Mongol disaster, weave a pattern of meaning into the disorders of nature and, like Lear's ill-fated adviser Gloucester, warn the reader as he approaches the tragic denouement that "these late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us."[143] The chaos into which nature had fallen was merely a divine indication of the corruption of the moral order: treacherous Shiʿis, rebellious Christians, and a weak Sunni caliph led by a Shiʿi vizier were all held to have contributed to the devastation of much of the Islamic world by the Mongols.[144] Gloucester's despairing words might well serve as an echo of the sentiments of the Sunni chroniclers of the mid-seventh/thirteenth century: "We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves."[145]

In Madina the violent wave of anti-Shiʿi sentiment took on added meaning. The Sunni minority blamed the terrible calamities afflicting the community of Islam on the Shiʿi ascendancy in the City of the Prophet. The reported collaboration of the Shiʿi vizier of Baghdad with the Mongols seemed to the Sunnis to confirm their belief that God was punishing his community for their toleration of the Shiʿa. After the fire it

had been widely rumored that this verse had mysteriously appeared on the charred walls of the mosque:

> The sanctuary of the Prophet did not burn because of a shameful accident
> Nor was it struck with dishonor
> But the hands of the Shiʿa polluted [the sanctuary] with their touch
> So it was purified with fire.[146]

This theme would become a topos in all Sunni literature on Madina. Writing in the fifteenth century, al-Samhūdī would present a narrative of the downfall of the Shiʿi religious elite of Madina in which the repeated and highly charged use of the word "fire" (*nār*) burns across the text. The fire of the Hijaz was God's sign that power would be taken from the Shiʿis and returned to the Sunnis; the fire in the mosque was a sign of the fall of Baghdad, a punishment and a purification; finally, when the Shiʿis were subjected to an official repression, "their fire was extinguished."[147]

By 658/1260 reports had reached the Hijaz that the Mongol leader Hülegü had advanced into Syria, capturing Aleppo and Damascus, and was sending raiding parties as far as the sanctuary of Hebron. In Cairo the new rulers of Egypt, the Mamluk amirs who had led a military coup in 648/1250 against their Ayyubid king, temporarily put aside their own internal struggle for power and prepared to defend Egypt from invasion. The defeat of a Mongol force by the Mamluk army at ʿAyn Jalūt (Goliath's Spring in modern Israel) on 25 Ramadan 658/September 3, 1260, rapidly took on mythic proportions. God had finally come to the aid of his community, and he had chosen the "Turks" of Egypt as the agents of his divine justice.[148]

The political configuration of the Middle East was irrevocably changed by the events that led up to ʿAyn Jalūt. The Mongols had in fact, by striking the death blow to the caliphate and destroying most of the Ayyubid principalities in Syria, facilitated the emergence of the last Egyptian-based empire in the premodern Middle East. Cairo was now the political center of the Muslim world, and the Mamluk sultans, the "kings of Egypt," whose dominion extended through Syria-Palestine into Asia Minor, were the uncontested guardians of its charismatic center, the Hijaz, site of the Two Sanctuaries of Mecca and Madina.

Not long after he had seized the throne of Egypt and Syria, al-Ẓāhir Baybars, one of the heroes of ʿAyn Jalūt, undertook two projects of

great symbolic import: the rebuilding of the Prophet's mosque and the creation of a new Cairo-based caliphate. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, to whom Baybars was often compared by his biographers, had called himself "servant of the Two Sanctuaries," but in the ideological sphere neither Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn nor his successors had been able to contest the caliph's authority in the holy cities. Even in 654/1256, when the caliphate was on the brink of destruction, the notables of Madina had consulted the caliph in Baghdad regarding the measures to be taken after the fire in the Prophet's sanctuary. Baybars ensured that this symbolic axis between Madina and Baghdad, shattered by the death of the caliph, would be transformed into an unquestioned bond between Madina and Cairo. He found a supposed survivor of the Abbasid house and set up a shadow caliphate in the Cairo Citadel, a caliphate that was overtly in the hands of the sultan.[149] In the Hijaz the Shiʿi rulers of the Holy Cities gave their allegiance to Baybars and governed in the name of the Sunni Egyptian sultans. In the years to come the tribal lords of the holy cities, descendants of the Prophet's son-in-law ʿAlī, would cling tenaciously to their Shiʿi doctrine in the face of ever-increasing pressure from Cairo. But they would never again exercise the political or religious independence they had enjoyed in the days of the Ayyubids. With the Mamluk ascendancy the "splendid isolation" of the Hijaz had definitively come to an end.

In 667/1269 Baybars made the pilgrimage and announced a reconstruction of the sanctuary—a reconstruction that would include a significant change in the structure of the sacred space around the tomb. One of the most striking features of the renovated sanctuary was the new barrier placed around the Prophet's tomb and the tomb of Fāṭima. When Baybars made the ritual visit to the Prophet's sanctuary, he announced his intention to place a wooden *maqṣūra* (enclosure) around the tomb. He took the measurements himself with a rope, and, on returning to Egypt, had his craftsmen begin the project. He sent fifty-three artisans to Madina under the command of the eunuch amir Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥsin al-Ṣāliḥī to carry out his orders.[150] The completed screen was sent to Madina the following year and set up in the sanctuary so that it enclosed the tomb, part of the Garden, and the tomb of Fāṭima. Three doors—on the southern, eastern, and western sides—were cut in the screen. From this point on, the Mamluk sultans followed a systematic program of renovation and additions to the sanctuary of Madina which far exceeded that of any previous dynasty.[151]

The very term *maqṣūra* connotes royal authority, since the first such enclosures were set up in the interior of mosques to separate the caliph from the rest of the congregation.[152] An earlier *maqṣūra* in the southern colonnade of the sanctuary was built, according to some traditions, by the seventh-century caliph, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān. This structure did not enclose the tomb, however, but a section of the Garden and was designed not to enhance the sacred honor of the dead Prophet but to protect the person of the living caliph from the knives of assassins.

This new structure was an imposing barrier which completely enclosed the sacred space of the tomb. Although the pious scholars conceded that the intention of Sultan Baybars was "to glorify the noble place" (*taʿẓīman li'l-buqʿa al-sharīfa*), this barrier provoked a great deal of controversy, especially since it cordoned off part of the Garden (*al-rawḍa*). The counterargument was that the sultan had a precedent, since ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had also closed off part of the Garden when he erected a hexagonal structure around the original chamber of ʿA'isha.[153] Just as the sacred space of the original tomb had been extended from ʿA'isha's chamber to the structure built by ʿUmar, it was now extended once more to the new *maqṣūra*: "Now this *maqṣūra* is known as the noble tomb and its doors are called the doors of the tomb and the lamps that are hung from its ceiling are called the lamps of the tomb."[154]

The enclosure built by ʿUmar was, however, like the sealed chamber of ʿA'isha, a structure without interior space. The addition of the *maqṣūra* of Baybars completely altered the ordering of the sacred space of the tomb by creating an interior corridor. Once the structure was erected, prayer was apparently forbidden inside the *maqṣūra* to everyone—except the eunuchs. Until 882/1477 ordinary men and women were still allowed to enter the enclosure to salute the Prophet. In that year, despite a pronounced opposition from one faction of the pious scholars, Sultan Çakmak issued a royal decree ordering all the doors to be shut.[155]

From this point on the ritual visit was made from outside the *maqṣūra* before a series of small windows in the barrier—replaced after the second fire of 886/1481 with a more elaborate screen of brass and iron—through which the worshiper would see only the heavy brocade of the covering, the "raiment" of the tomb, and the flickering lights of hundreds of costly lamps. The control over the interior corridor, the changing of the embroidered cover of the tomb, and the lighting of these lamps became essential elements in the rituals of what could now be

called a kind of eunuch priesthood. The situation as the disgruntled al-Samhūdī, one of the members of the opposing faction of pious scholars, described it in the ninth/fifteenth century would continue up until the twentieth: "Now the doors are not opened at all except at the time of the lighting of lamps and then only some of the eunuchs and the janitors enter or someone of high rank with the permission of the chief eunuch."[156]

When Sultan Qa'itbay made his ritual visit in 884/1479, al-Samhūdī met with him in the Garden of the Prophet, in the spot outside the barrier where people stood to salute the Messenger of God, in the hope that he could persuade the sultan to allow the doors to be reopened. He watched as the sultan, by virtue of his rank, was offered the opportunity to enter the *maqṣūra*. Overwhelmed, Qa'itbay responded: "If I could stand and make my ritual visit from a place even further than this, then I would do it." Al-Samhūdī observed: "I saw then that this was glorification [*taʿẓīm*] and that he would never agree to what I wanted." In the sultan's court distance equaled respect. Only individuals of high rank could approach the physical presence of the sultan. Qa'itbay's assertion that if he could, he would stand even further away was meant—as al-Samhūdī recognized—as glorification, veneration of the Prophet.[157]

From the time of Baybars, the Mamluk sultans had done their best to introduce aspects of imperial ceremonies into the tomb of the Prophet. It is not surprising that Qa'itbay, once in the presence of the Prophet, would place himself in the same spatial relationship to the Prince of all Creation as a petitioner might stand in relation to the sultan in Qa'itbay's own court. Likewise, just as when Qa'itbay retreated into his private residence in the Citadel with his *ḥarīm* only the *khuddām al-ḥawsh* (the "eunuchs of the courtyard") had access to his person, so in the tomb/household/*ḥarīm* of the Prophet, the eunuch guardians of this holy place controlled access to the Messenger of God.

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3

More Exalted Than the Service of Kings

The "Row of the Eunuchs"

One Friday morning in the late thirteenth century, the Egyptian jurist and renowned Sunni preacher Sirāj al-Dīn al-Anṣārī reluctantly ascended the carved wooden pulpit of the Prophet's mosque in Madina. He had scarcely finished the opening lines of the ritual Friday sermon when the Shiʿi members of the congregation began to stone him with handfuls of pebbles from the gravel-strewn courtyard of the mosque. At this point the eunuchs of the Prophet, with their entire household retinues drawn up behind them, rose en masse, moved to the front of the mosque, and calmly seated themselves between the preacher and the crowd.

Years later the Sunni judge Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn, having joined in an official repression of the Shiʿis in the City of the Prophet, would enthusiastically recall this scene from his boyhood:

> I saw them stoning him [Sirāj al-Dīn] with gravel, and when this became extreme, the eunuchs came forward and sat before him, and this is the reason for the placing of the "row of the eunuchs" [*ṣaff al-khuddām*] on Friday before the preacher with their retainers and slaves behind them. This was done in service and protection of the [Sunni] judgeship and as a defense of the weak and as a victory for the Holy Law. And see what unity they enjoyed and how their hearts came together [on this], may God have mercy on them.[158]

In the Sunni historiographic tradition the forming of the "row of the eunuchs" is a dramatic moment in a conflict between good and evil,

between the weak and the strong. On one side of the conflict are the pious and defenseless *mujāwirūn* (the "neighbors" and "protected clients" of the sanctuary), Sunni religious scholars who have recently immigrated to Madina, drawn there by their own "longing for the *ḥaram*" or, like the long-suffering Sirāj al-Dīn, sent there as agents of "Sunnification" by order of the Mamluk sultan.[159] On the other side are the villains: the amirs of Madina, the local Shiʿi rulers who, despite their status as descendants of the Prophet, are often portrayed as men of savage violence; their cousins, the Shiʿi scholars who control the religious offices in the city; and, finally, the agents of violence, the faceless, stone-throwing Shiʿi mob.[160] The eunuchs, "friends and brothers of the *mujāwirūn*," "protectors of the people of the *sunna*," stand between the two and, when evil nearly triumphs over good, put in an appearance as a kind of collective Sunni deus ex machina.

It is within the context of this drama that the "eunuchs of the Prophet" emerge from the relative obscurity of the first century of their existence and acquire a kind of hagiographic image, an image that would continue to inform their sacred persona long after the ascendancy of the Shiʿi religious scholars in Madina had become an episode of the past. The literature within which this image is embedded is passionate and intensely personal. The Sunni scholars who first committed this image to paper in the form of the lives of renowned eunuchs were contemporaries and often friends of the individuals whom they described. These authors, members of a small and close-knit group of Sunni jurists, tended to be second-generation immigrants to Madina, the sons of scholarly men who felt that they had been forced into a subordinate role at the hands of the then-ascendant Shiʿis.[161] The men of these families were intimately tied to one another by the bonds of teacher-student relationships, by their shared anti-Shiʿi mission, and by close personal friendships.[162] As children they had on more than one occasion witnessed the intervention of the eunuchs of the Prophet on behalf of the "people of the *sunna*," a small and to them by no means abstract collectivity composed of their fathers and their teachers.

As an adult Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn wrote bitterly of his childhood memories of the humiliation inflicted on his father, a prominent Sunni legal scholar, by the Shiʿi judge ʿAlī ibn Sinān:

> It used to be that when the *mujāwirūn* and the people of the *sunna* wanted a marriage contract or legal document according to their [Sun-

> ni] legal school, they would come to my father to confirm the contract for them or to arbitrate between them. He would say, "I won't do it until you bring me a document from ʿAlī ibn Sinān." So they would entreat him [ʿAlī ibn Sinān] and give him what he customarily took [by way of a fee] so that he would write a document for them to my father, the text of which was: "O, Abū ʿAbd Allah, confirm the marriage between so-and-so and so-and-so" or "arbitrate between so-and-so and so-and-so."[163]

Such compliance, Ibn Farḥūn added, was incumbent upon his father, for "if a marriage was confirmed in the city without the permission of ʿAlī ibn Sinān and without his order, the parties involved would be summoned by the 'lords' [the Āl Shīhā], who would upbraid them and subject them to a penalty."[164]

The Āl Shīhā, the rulers of Madina, had, by their overt opposition to the sultan's Sunni appointees, maintained the supremacy not only of an old and strongly rooted Shiʿi tradition in the city but also of their local authority, based on blood descent from the Prophet, over and against the authority of a distant imperial center. Their cousins, the scholarly Āl Sinān, had traditionally held a monopoly on the offices of Friday preacher (*khaṭīb*) and prayer leader (*imām*) in the Prophet's mosque and on the office of chief judge in Madina.[165] Another Shiʿi family, the Qayshaniyyūn, who were described as having come originally from Iraq in the days of the Fatimids, provided the leading jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) of the sanctuary.[166]

The Fatimids, founders of the city of Cairo and rulers for two hundred years of a Shiʿi empire which had encompassed much of what was now Mamluk territory, play a convenient "origin" role in Mamluk texts for any continued manifestation of Shiʿi power. Madina had an old Shiʿi tradition, however, and the Banū Ḥusayn, of whom the Āl Shīhā were one branch, had been in control of the City of the Prophet long before the Fatimids gained control of the Hijaz. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the *sharīf* Ẓāhir ibn Muslim, progenitor of the Āl Shīhā, had actually come to the City of the Prophet fleeing the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz. Ẓāhir had been taken in by the Banū Ḥusayn, who made him their leader and gave him control of the city.[167]

The appointment of Sirāj al-Dīn was a direct threat to the scholarly Ḥusaynid families of Madina. The loyalty of the local amirs to men who shared their Ḥusaynid descent as much as their commitment to Shiʿi doctrine seems to have impelled the Āl Shīhā both to countenance and

to encourage the harassment of the unfortunate Sunni judge. The Shiʿi preachers of Madina had, after all, been delivering the Friday sermon following the Sunni formula in Madina since the late twelfth century. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the reputed founder of the eunuchs of the Prophet, had deposed the last Fatimid caliph in 1171 and recast Cairo as the center of a Sunni empire. The local rulers of Mecca and Madina had recognized the new sultan of Egypt as their overlord, and the Hijaz had been restored to nominal Sunni rule. From this point on the Shiʿi preachers in the Prophet's mosque had been compelled to acknowledge the symbolic authority of the Sunni caliphate in the *khuṭba*, the Friday sermon.[168]

But neither Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn nor his descendants appear to have made any attempt to "sunnify" the City of the Prophet.[169] The Shiʿi elite of Madina continued to control most religious offices in the sanctuary, and Shiʿi judges exercised jurisdiction over Sunni and Shiʿi alike. The forced acknowledgment of the Sunni caliph in the Friday sermon, a formal statement of Sunni political legitimacy, was subverted by a shrewd manipulation of religious imagery. Ibn Farḥūn recalled that his own father's nemesis, the father of the powerful Shiʿi judge and preacher ʿAlī ibn Sinān, would go immediately to his home after the completion of Friday services and order a ram to be slaughtered for distribution to the poor. This highly visible act of sacrifice evoked shared Islamic values of charity for both Sunni and Shiʿi. But it could also be read as a ritual act of expiation for Ibn Sinān's use of the Sunni formula in his Friday sermon, an open display of Shiʿi opposition as well as of Shiʿi wealth.[170]

The Āl Shīhā and Āl Sinān had driven Sirāj al-Dīn out of the city once before, despite his original mandate from Sultan Qalāwūn, and had driven out subsequent appointees from Cairo. Finally, the sultan had sent Sirāj al-Dīn back to Madina as the preacher and imam of the people of the *sunna* (presumably this time with orders to stay put), and the Friday rock-throwing had commenced yet again.

The first appearance of the "row of the eunuchs" seems to have been closely timed with the arrival from Cairo of a ceremonial robe for Sirāj al-Dīn and an order from the sultan that the preacher also assume the office of judge (for the Sunni community), thus striking another and more serious blow against the Shiʿi elite. Although Ibn Farḥūn described the eunuchs' action on that particular Friday morning as a unanimous and spontaneous expression of their piety, it seems possible that the "row of the eunuchs" was a carefully planned demonstration of the authority of the distant sultan.[171]

One could argue that the eunuchs of the Prophet were more qualified to serve as the sultan's agents than civilian scholars such as the reluctant Sirāj al-Dīn. At this time most of the eunuchs came to "the noble service" of the Prophet in their mature years after a long tenure in the Cairo Citadel, "at the doors of the sultan."[172] These former Citadel eunuchs had themselves been part of the Mamluk military system and had close personal bonds with the ruling elite of the empire, the Mamluk amirs. At the same time, many Citadel eunuchs had ties with pious Sunni scholars and participated in the different but equally intense relationships born out of the exchange of religious knowledge. Like the pious scholars, these eunuchs were learned and devout individuals, reciters of the Qurʾan, students of jurisprudence and prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*).[173] Those eunuchs who came from the Citadel were most certainly multilingual, having a command of Arabic, the language of scholarship, as well as of the Turkish dialect of the military, the language of armed men and of power.

Before they "made the *hijra* to God and his Prophet,"[174] the eunuchs who rose up to form a barrier between the Shiʿi congregation and the Sunni preacher had formed the first circle of seclusion around the sultan. Beyond their individual pasts in Cairo, they had as a category a strong resonance with the *nāmūs,* the sacral quality of rulership. None of this would have been lost on the lords of Madina, who knew ultimately that they could defy the sultan only up to a certain point. They may well have realized that the "row of the eunuchs" set the limit to their defiance.

But the sultan's power of intervention, as everyone in Madina knew, was not immediate. At the time of the forming of the "row of the eunuchs" there was no permanent Mamluk garrison in the Hijaz. Every year, in the sacred month of Dhū al-ḥijja, the high-ranking Mamluk amir who was designated "commander of the pilgrimage" would lead a numerous and well-guarded caravan from Cairo to the Hijaz. After completing the pilgrimage rites at Mecca, the pilgrims would then go on to Madina to perform the ritual visit to the Prophet's tomb. This was the only time of year when there was an official, armed Sunni presence in Mecca and Madina. The Shiʿi lords of both cities—the Āl Shīhā and their rivals, the Ḥasanid Banū Muhanna of Mecca—had their own armed corps of highly trained African military slaves, the *ʿabīd al-ashrāf.* When the pilgrimage caravan, with its Mamluk guardsmen, left the Hijaz for Cairo, the lords of the Hijaz were free to exercise their

considerable powers of intimidation, and the authority of the Mamluk sultan was distant indeed.[175]

The power of the "row of the eunuchs" and of its continued reenactment every Friday for centuries did not depend solely on the threat of Mamluk retaliation. This was a symbolic act, rendered all the more powerful by its apparent simplicity. When the eunuchs placed themselves between Sirāj al-Dīn and the gravel-throwing Shiʿi congregation, they were, on one level, making a statement of imperial policy. They were also using a physical act, simple enough in itself, to establish a moral boundary. In so doing, the eunuchs manifested the very essence of their peculiar mediatory role. They thus summoned up a series of associations with other fundamental boundaries which preserved humankind from the ever-present danger of *fitna*, disorder on all levels. The eunuchs, who as a category (*ṭāʾifa*) embodied both ambiguity and mediation, thus forced the antagonists into a common moral construct that went far deeper than their political and doctrinal differences.

The word *ṭāʾifa* is one of the most common designations in medieval Arabic for any kind of human category or subcategory. When the eunuchs of the Prophet are described as a group, separated out from the rest of society, the word most commonly used by writers in Arabic from the Mamluk period on is *ṭāʾifa*.[176] For example, the diploma of investiture for the chief eunuch of Madina, which al-Qalqashandī includes in his fifteenth-century encyclopedia for scribes, refers to the responsibility of the chief eunuch toward "this *ṭāʾifa* over whom he has been given authority" and urges him "to enjoin every individual from among the *ṭāʾifa* of the eunuchs to that which will bring him closer to God in service . . . to guide the one who departs from the laws of the service (*qawānīn al-khidma*) to the right path and to be an example to them by the decorum (*adab*) of his [own] path which will become for them a clear guide and a bright sign."[177]

This same document describes the chief eunuch as one "whom good fortune has led to the service (*khidma*) of the Messenger of God so that by means of its exalted jewel he might turn away from the honor of the service of kings." Like the first Muslims whose *hijra*, or emigration, from Mecca to Madina signified a dramatic break with their past world, the eunuch of the Prophet who abandons the "service of kings" is described as "one whose *hijra*—which is a true *hijra* to God and his Prophet—has been accepted as a pure offering by God."[178]

By the fourteenth century, when the new wave of learned Sunni

immigrants was battling the Shiʿi religious elite for control of the Prophet's sanctuary, the eunuchs of the Prophet formed a distinct organization with its own sacred identity. Their *ṭāʾifa* performed a holy office, the noble service (*al-khidma al-sharīfa*) of the Prophet, an office that was increasingly defined by specific rituals involving the control of space and objects that were charged with prophetic charisma. They had their own rules (*qawānīn*), customs (*ʿādāt*), and hierarchy of positions as well as a powerful and independent economic base. Their entry into the noble service of the Prophet was a symbolic departure from their old worldly life, but their Cairo ties, personal and economic, were never severed.

In Madina the eunuchs lived in their own quarter and maintained large extended households of slaves, freedmen, freedwomen, and clients. But they themselves, having been raised in slavery and socialized through slavery into the Muslim world, brought with them a complex network of personal ties of loyalty which began in the household of their former masters. By the time the eunuchs moved to Madina, they were themselves freedmen, often wealthy older individuals with a long career in the Cairo Citadel. Beyond their household of origin (the household of their manumitter), they could potentially command other networks: royal women, Mamluk officers whom they had trained in the barracks, their own freed slaves and clients in Cairo, and, most important, other eunuchs. The holy *ṭāʾifa* to which they now belonged, the *ṭāʾifa* of the eunuchs of the Prophet, was still a part of the broader *ṭāʾifa* of all eunuchs.

A Jurist's Perspective

In ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī's pious treatise on society and ethics, *Kitāb muʿīd al-niʿam wa-mubīd al-niqam* (The Book of the Guide to [Divine] Benefits and the Averting of [Divine] Vengeance), he alternately divides the believers into *waẓāʾif* (offices) and *ṭawāʾif* (categories), words he uses almost synonymously. The former designation seems more appropriate to his system, since social categories for al-Subkī are very much defined by what people do, that is, by their occupations. Since his concern is with individual responsibility and piety within these social categories, women, whom al-Subkī characterizes as "lacking in reason and religion," and young children are by definition excluded.[179]

Al-Subkī begins with the two highest positions in Muslim society, those of the caliph and of the sultan. He then lists the principal administrative positions in the sultan's government, and gives an account of the military hierarchy and of the civilian bureaucracy. He then proceeds to his own social group, the religious scholars (whom he subjects to a scathing criticism), then to mosque functionaries, Sufis, merchants, craftsmen, laborers, and, in the lowest order, night watchmen, street sweepers, shoemakers, beggars, and so on. The people who hold these positions (*waẓāʾif*) are, however, referred to collectively as "groups" (*ṭawāʾif*).

Eunuchs, with the clear implication that "eunuchness" is itself an office, are included in a separate chapter in the section of the book that deals with palace offices. The eunuchs, however, are themselves divided into subgroups according to office: the *zimām,* who is concerned with women, and the *muqaddam al-mamālik,* "who has authority over adolescent boys." Both the *zimām* and the *muqaddam* are linked together as one *ṭāʾifa,* that of the eunuchs (*ṭawāshiya*).[180]

Al-Subkī gives us three possible embodiments of the eunuch: the *mamsūḥ,* whose penis and testicles have been removed; the *khaṣī,* whose testicles alone have been removed; and the *majbūb,* whose penis has been removed but whose testicles have been left intact. He then provides his readers with a survey of the opinions of leading jurists of the Sunni legal schools regarding the acceptability of the *mamsūḥ*'s looking at *ajnabiyyāt* ("strange women," i.e., women other than those he serves). Al-Subkī "and most of our colleagues," he tells us, agree that this is permitted for the *mamsūḥ,* the "smooth" eunuch, but not for the *khaṣī* or the *majbūb.* For looking on a woman who owns him, or whose husband owns him, any eunuch, al-Subkī argues, is more acceptable than an uncastrated slave, rebuking those jurists who argue that the gaze of an uncastrated slave upon his mistress is permitted: "How can it be permitted for handsome mamluks who inspire *fitna* with their beauty to look upon their mistresses when women are 'lacking in reason and religion'!" The gaze of the women themselves is addressed in one line in which al-Subkī cites the opinion of Mālik ibn Anas, the founder of the Mālikī school of jurisprudence, that a woman should look on a eunuch only if he is owned by her or her husband.[181]

What is striking about al-Subkī's discussion of the eunuchs is that they are the only category of human beings in his social scheme whose office (*waẓīfa*) is inscribed on their flesh. His own doubts about how to

gender the eunuchs, given the indeterminate nature of their bodies, are reflected in his discussion of their moral qualities. Al-Subkī tells us that the devoted obedience of the eunuch to the one he serves is well known. But this same quality has its negative side, for it arises from the eunuch's lack of rational ability (like that of women) and their general similarity to women. But the eunuch's own identity is indeterminate, for "when he mixes with women, he tells himself that he is a man, when he is with men, he tells himself that he is a woman." The final list of qualities that al-Subkī reports is a combination of both "male" and "female" attributes: "It is said that eunuchs are the harshest people in their jealousy and the most distinguished in both the kindness and the firm leadership which they display to the one who is under their authority, whether a woman or a mamluk."[182]

The sexual ambiguities al-Subkī raises concerning the moral status within society of the eunuch, both as one who looks and one who is looked at, who can imagine himself as either male or female, are intimately connected with the shaping of the eunuchs' bodies by society. The eunuch, after all, unlike the hermaphrodite, is made, not born. This "making," the act of castration, was and is forbidden under Islamic law.[183] Slave traders, at least in theory, castrated young boys on the borders of the Islamic realm before importing them. This legal fiction, however, was still troubling to some pious scholars. Al-Subkī ends his chapter with the statement that one can find in the books of the Ḥanafī legal school that its founder, Abū Ḥanīfa, declared the taking of eunuchs into one's service reprehensible (*yukrah*), not forbidden (*yuḥram*), because making use of eunuchs was "an abetment of castration, which is [a] prohibited [act]."[184]

Fear and Trembling

Al-Subkī's eunuchs, ambiguous and morally disconcerting figures, were reconstituted in Madina as representatives of piety and charismatic authority by Sunni religious scholars who, in their education and outlook, were men very much like al-Subkī. The written creation of a sacred image for the eunuchs was the work of these scholars. But the image was informed and enacted on the ritual stage of the *ḥaram* by the eunuchs themselves. Unlike al-Subkī's eunuch, the eunuch of the Prophet was endowed with an excess of the virtues of "reason and

religion." But the saintly eunuch of the Sunni historians of Madina did not stand in radical opposition to the problematic eunuch of al-Subkī's text. The category of eunuch—as indeterminate as his physical body—could be endowed with a positive just as easily as with a negative value.

Al-Subkī, quoting a proverb that appears in normative collections of prophetic traditions and in the works of Arabic belletrists, described the eunuch as imagining himself to be both male and female. Within the sacred space of the *ḥaram* of Madina, the eunuch is also given both male and female qualities. He is "like a kind father and a compassionate mother to the [Sunni] *mujāwirūn*."[185] In the context of the Sunni–Shiʿi struggle, the eunuch is also a figure of power, endowed with a very "masculine" ability to inspire fear.

The Shiʿi amirs of Madina, as they are presented in the Sunni sources, are often violent and intimidating men. But a potentially more intimidating force is encompassed in the figure of the elderly eunuch Kāfūr, "the best of the [elite] people in his appearance, the most complete in his perfect character and his awe-inspiring presence [*aḥsan al-nās shaklan wa-atammuhumm kamālan wa-mahāban*]."[186] Kāfūr's ability to inspire awe and reverence, his *mahāba* or *hayba*, is, in the Sunni biographical literature, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the leading eunuchs of the Prophet.

The application of the words *mahāba* and *hayba* and the related forms of the root *h*y*b* to the eunuchs by their contemporaries conjured up a series of strong associations with power, both worldly and divine. Such associations were far more intense and immediate than those generated in the mind of the modern speaker of English by the word "awe." *Hayba* rests first and foremost on fear (*makhāfa*). The possessor of *hayba*, whether God, the sultan, or the chief eunuch of Madina, is "dreadful" in the true sense of the word. The very presence of the *mahāb* inspires a fear and trembling in the hearts of men. It is within this context that one modern scholar has described *hayba* as the "salutary 'awe' or 'dread' which surrounds kingly authority by virtue of its threat of coercion."[187] Nonetheless, when Ibn Farḥūn wrote of Kāfūr al-Ḥarīrī that "he filled the hearts of 'the lords' [of Madina] with terror," he was referring to a terror (*ruʿb*) which suggests more than fear of coercion.[188]

The *hayba* of the eunuchs of the Prophet derives as much from their uncompromising piety as it does from their former positions of authority in the Cairo Citadel. This piety manifests itself individually through personal acts of devotion and asceticism. Its communal manifestation is

one of large-scale charitable works, lavish acts of generosity, single-minded focus on the Sunni community. The eunuchs, as their biographers repeatedly remind us, are pious not only because they are observant, devout, and charitable Muslims. They are also pious because they are loyal to the Sunni religious leaders, because they use their resources, both economic and political, in the cause of the Sunni *ʿulamāʾ*, and because they direct their zeal against the Shiʿis. The eunuchs, possessors of *hayba*, inspire a "salutary dread" in Sunnis as well as Shiʿis, but they use their *hayba* in the Sunni cause. For the Sunni biographers of the eunuchs it was important to stress repeatedly that these pious and awe-inspiring eunuchs were on their side, the side of the "people of the Holy Law," who are, of course, the Sunni scholars, "the good people" (*ahl al-khayr*).

The biographies of the individual eunuchs play on these themes and repeat them over and over like variations in a musical composition. The eunuch Shafīʿ was "one of the greatest of his race in the awe and submission which he inspired. . . . He would pounce upon anyone from whom he saw the least opposition. With his courage, he would strike anyone whom he saw associating with one of the heretics," that is, the Shiʿis. His biographer speaks with approval of the "*ṣawla ʿaẓīma,*" "the arbitrary power" Shafīʿ exercised in the mosque of the Prophet.[189] Naṣr al-Dīn Naṣr was "awe inspiring and harsh [*kāna mahāban ṣāriman*]"; he "memorized the Qurʾan and was frequent in his fasts [*yaḥfaẓu al-Qurʾān wa-yaktharu al-ṣiyām*]." He was also "one of the brothers of the *mujāwirūn* and one of those who loved them" and a particular friend of a leader of the Sunni faction: "He was devoted to al-Jamāl al-Maṭarī and never departed from his opinion or his counsel."[190] Yāqūt al-Khāzindārī, known for his devotion to *ḥadīth* and to prayer, was a model eunuch who had left the "service of kings" for that of the Prophet. He had served in the Cairo Citadel for over thirty years before his appointment as chief eunuch of Madina. During that time he had refused, out of fear of God, to take any salary that did not come from the *jizya,* the canonical tax on non-Muslims. When he was appointed to the post of chief eunuch, he declined the substantial stipend that was due to him from the sanctuary's endowments, "and his *mahāba* became great among the people."[191]

In the biographical (one might call it hagiographical) literature from Madina, the quality of *mahāba* or *hayba* is not only manifested in the pious actions of the eunuchs; it permeates their physical appearance.

The distinctive features of the physique of the prepubertal castrate—especially his height—would be described as repellent by nineteenth- and twentieth-century European observers. But Mamluk biographies of the eunuchs often praise their appearance with adjectives such as *jamīl* (beautiful), *wasīm* (handsome), and *aḥsan* (the best, most beautiful) or *akmal* (the most perfect). The dreaded Kāfūr al-Ḥarīrī was "the best of the [elite] people in his appearance."[192] Bilāl al-Mughīthī was "awe-inspiring, perfect in his appearance."[193] The eunuch Shafīʿ "was a [true] eunuch in his appearance and height. He was the greatest of his race in his ability to inspire dread and his authority."[194] So powerful was the sensory impact of *hayba* that even the sound of Kāfūr's voice in anger could cause an innocent muezzin in the Prophet's mosque to fall off his minaret and plunge to his death.[195]

For the Sunni scholars the most dramatic narratives of eunuch "dreadfulness" were those that involved a direct or indirect challenge to the authority of the Shiʿi amirs of Madina. In one such narrative a venal Shiʿi amir sells the religious offices formerly held by the recently deceased Muḥammad ibn Farḥūn to "an evildoer." He thus violates the custom of passing such offices from father to son and, more seriously, removes these newly won Sunni posts from Sunni control. The son who is left destitute by this action is Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn, the author of many of these narratives. Upon hearing the news, the elderly eunuch of the Prophet, Ṣawwāb al-Mughīthī, leaps up from his post in the mosque and cries out, "By God, this accursed one will not be appointed to *our* office and he will only teach in it over my dead body!" He rouses the chief eunuch Zuhayr al-Dīn Mukhtaṣṣ al-Ashrafī, and together they rush off to confront the amir on behalf of Badr al-Dīn and his young brothers. So great is the awe inspired by these two elderly eunuchs that the amir, hearing of Ṣawwāb's outburst, retreats from his position even before their arrival. Just as the "row of the eunuchs" acts as a restraining boundary, limiting Shiʿi power in the City of the Prophet and restoring order, Ṣawwāb's pious outrage also delimits the authority of the amir of Madina.[196]

It is not surprising that one version of this story should come from the pen of Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn himself. Al-Sakhāwī, writing in the late fifteenth century, almost one hundred years after Badr al-Dīn's death, presents to his readers long quotations, with careful attribution, from the work of Ibn Farḥūn. In his biography of Ṣawwāb, as in most of his biographies of the eunuchs of the Prophet, al-Sakhāwī also gives a

parallel text from a biographical and topographical study of Madina by the lexicographer al-Firūzābādī. Al-Firūzābādī, who was some thirty-eight years younger than Ibn Farḥūn, reworked and incorporated the latter's narratives into his own baroque tapestry of rhymed prose. His account of the eunuch Ṣawwāb and the amir of Madina plays on various words from the same root meaning "to help" or "to seek help," words that resonate both with Ṣawwāb's *nisba* or ascriptive name, al-Mughīthī (from al-Mugīth, "the helper"), and with the attributes of the Prophet, the greatest of all advocates and intercessors. Ṣawwāb is both the helper (*al-mugīth*) and the one who (successfully) seeks the help of the Prophet (*istigātha*). The Shiʿi amir does not fear God. He is the wolf who overcomes the flock (the Sunni orphans). But Ṣawwāb comes to the aid of the threatened flock. His boldness (*ṣarāma*) and astuteness (*shihāma*), characteristics of the "dreaded" eunuch, triumph over the amir's impiety, and the orphans are restored to their father's posts.[197]

In the Sunni biographies the fear-inspiring eunuch of the Prophet, known for his dignity and gravity, can also be gentle and informal. A patron of the poor and the weak, of women and children, the eunuch can be humble and compassionate, himself almost childlike. Neither man nor woman, the eunuch of the Prophet unites the tender qualities of both the male and the female parent since he behaves "like a fond mother and a compassionate father" to the Sunni immigrants. The eunuch Surūr Ṭarbay "raised orphans with indulgence and gentleness."[198] The chief eunuch Dīnār supported widows and orphans "and favored them with food and clothes and dwellings so that they were numbered among the members of his household." He knew all the children of the Sunni immigrants by name: "Whenever he saw anyone, he would ask him about himself and his dependents and about everyone in his house, women and men, questions which showed his love of God in the kindness of his speech."[199] His namesake and contemporary Dīnār al-Muʿizzī turned his own home into a hospice for the sick. Whenever he heard that someone had fallen ill, especially beggars and poor students, he would come to their bedside himself with nourishing food and his own home-brewed medicines, "not delegating this to a slave or retainer."[200]

This more gentle personification of the "dreadful" eunuch is also marked by guilelessness (*sadhāja*) and a naive disregard for wealth. Kāfūr al-Khiḍrī used to place his stipend from the sanctuary endowments in a sugar sack at home rather than lock it away "because of his

asceticism and lack of greed for worldly things." In the morning Kāfūr would reach into the sack, take out a sum, and, without even counting the money, would hand it out to beggars as well as to women and children whom he encountered on the street.[201] Rashīd al-Hindī, known for his charities on behalf of the students of the religious colleges, was described in similar terms and praised for his "innocence and lack of guile in worldly matters"; "deception and hypocrisy were unknown to him."[202] Dīnār al-Muʿizzī returned from a journey to find that the Sunni scholar to whom he had entrusted his household in his absence had mismanaged his affairs and caused him to lose 25,000 dinars. Dīnār refused the man's offer of restitution. When his associates urged him to accept the money, he replied: "This man is one of those with whom I have a friendship before God, for he taught me the Qurʾan. I will not hold him liable . . . and he will not be disgraced." Dīnār exonerated the man and "continued to be his close friend until death separated them."[203]

Embedded in this representation of the naive and generous eunuch is a certain paradox. In the Sunni literature on Madina the eunuchs figure as benefactors of the poor and of the pious. They dispense alms, support widows and orphans, and put up large sums of money to gain the release of imprisoned debtors. They also endow religious colleges, build buildings, and place their rents in trust for scholars; purchase, raise, and manumit male and female slaves; and take on dependents beyond their own freed people. They give lavish feasts and make grand gestures of charity, like Dīnār's forgiving of the debt of his former Qurʾan teacher. Thus, although they practice personal asceticism and are presumed to be innocent in worldly affairs, the eunuchs of the Prophet are tremendously and ostentatiously wealthy.

The chief eunuch Dīnār al-Murshidī was "devoted to recitation and waged war against the self with fasts and vigils, with charity and good deeds." His "charity and good deeds" included the manumission of thirty slaves, "male and female, black and white."[204] Ṣawwāb al-Mughīthī, who had interceded for the Banū Farḥūn with the amir of Madina, was known for his austere piety. "His days were spent in fasting and his nights in vigils." On the occasions of his *nawba,* or turn spending the night inside the *ḥaram,* however, Ṣawwāb would give lavish feasts with exotic dishes "the likes of which are only found on the tables of great kings," to which he would invite both acquaintances and strangers. Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn, who owed his employment to this eunuch, wrote: "All the eunuchs used to do this so that they could

compete with one another in generosity, seeking through this the face of Almighty God."[205]

In the works of Ibn Farḥūn and his literary successors, the textual staging of the drama of Madina's Sunni–Shiʿi conflict is paramount. The role the eunuchs play in that drama is one of piety and dignity, of otherworldly innocence combined with an awe-inspiring presence, of selfless charity and tender solicitude for the Sunni population of Madina. The narrators do not dwell on the wealth of the eunuchs either as individuals or as a well-funded body. It is the charity of the eunuchs that is important, especially when that charity benefits Sunni scholars and indigent Sunni students. The economic resources that make such munificence possible are simply taken for granted. Similarly, it is the loyalty of the eunuchs to leading Sunni scholars that matters in this dramatic context, not their loyalty to one another.

In other representations of the eunuchs of the Prophet their wealth is one of their most striking features. Travelers from Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in the fourteenth century to Eldon Rutter in the twentieth describe the affluence of the society in language that ranges from admiration and awe to suspicion and pursed-lipped disapproval. This affluence was the result of revenues from pious foundations set up for the eunuch society in Egypt, in Madina itself, and in other parts of the Muslim world; from stipends from the imperial center, first Cairo and then Istanbul; from individual donations and foundations; and from the eunuchs' own business ventures.

A number of surviving deeds of pious foundations from the Mamluk period confirm this image of affluence. Most of the documents are for foundations set up by Citadel eunuchs, those who did not leave the service of the kings for that of the Prophet. But a series of documents issued in the name of one Muqbil al-Rūsī ("the Russian"), a eunuch of the Prophet, contain descriptions of landholdings in Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz which are staggering in number.[206]

But these documents present much more than an inventory of property. They present a connection between Cairo and Madina that other sources omit. This is not the connection between Mamluk amirs and the eunuchs who were their former tutors in the Citadel. Nor is it the connection between members of the same household, although such forms of loyalty are also manifested in these documents. What the documents do reveal is a loyalty defined by membership in the peculiar category of eunuch, a loyalty that implies a shared sense of difference which coexists with and sometimes transcends other loyalties.

The center of this eunuch loyalty was the tomb of the Prophet in Madina. The eunuchs who served the Prophet thus held a special position not only in the religious and political imagination of Muslims but also in the particular self-structuring of the *ṭāʾifa* of the eunuchs.

The Eunuch Network

Not every eunuch "from the doors of the sultan" could take up residence in the sacred space of the sanctuary. But those who remained occupied with the worldly concerns of the state could establish substitutes to pray in their name in Madina. The surviving Mamluk deeds of endowment for Citadel eunuchs in Cairo contain a number of provisions for creating new positions in the eunuch society of Madina. In most cases these positions are specifically designated for "unemployed" eunuchs (*al-khuddām al-baṭṭālīn*).[207]

The Grand Treasurer of the sultan, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf min Anişbay, made this provision in his endowment deed of 15 Rabiʿ II 904:

> From that [same fund] there is also to be paid out—in addition to the aforementioned stipend—every lunar year, 875 silver dirhams minted in Egypt. . . . The administrator of the endowment will prepare this sum every year and send it with the person designated from among the travelers with the noble procession of the season which goes every year from well-guarded Cairo to the noble Hijaz. And he will hand over that sum to a eunuch from among the good and pious people among the unemployed eunuchs with no position or stipend in the endowment of the lords, the eunuchs who are resident in the noble *ḥaram*. The noble chief eunuch will choose him at that point and single him out and appoint him to the office [*waẓīfa*] of his eunuchs in the Noble Chamber of the Prophet on the condition that he take the place of the aforementioned author of the endowment . . . and undertakes what others among the eunuchs who have a position and a stipend undertake in the way of required service. He is to do what they are required to do and to be responsible for what they are responsible for, just as if he were one of them, in that respect acting as a substitute for the aforementioned author of the endowment. And he is required to read what he is responsible for reading from the mighty Qurʾan before the noble *ḥujra* of the Prophet and at the end of the reading he is to pray for the Prophet and for his brothers from among the [other] prophets and messengers [of God] and the companions and the "people of the House" and the martyrs and the truthful ones and the holy ones all together. Then he is to pray for the author of the endow-

> ment and he is to name him by name and say "O, my lord, o messenger of God, your slave and the eunuch/servant [*khādim*] of your ashes ʿAbd al-Laṭīf min Anisbay asks you for intercession."[208]

Other eunuchs simply handed over a sum to the chief eunuch to be distributed as he thought fit "to the unemployed eunuchs living in the Madina of the Prophet." The wording of some of these deeds of endowment clearly indicates that the "unemployed" are exiled Citadel eunuchs. Ṣawwāb al-Khawarazmī gives one sixth of the proceeds of his endowment to "the amirs, the poor exiled eunuchs who are living [*mujāwirīn*] in the sanctuary of our master, the Prophet of God."[209]

Muqbil al-Rūsī, himself a eunuch of the Prophet, makes repeated endowments to the society, "to the lords, the eunuchs dwelling in Noble Madina, attached to the service of the noble *ḥujra* of the Prophet," "to the one who has an *iqṭāʿ* [a grant of revenue from state land] and to the one who has no *iqṭāʿ*," "to the ones with *iqṭāʿ* and to the *baṭṭālīn*."[210] The eunuchs ʿAbd al-Laṭīf and Jawhar combine their provisions for water distribution to the poor in Madina with the expenditure of 12,000 dirhams a year to the *khuddām baṭṭālīn*.[211] Khushqadam al-Rūmī, *zimāmdār* of the Citadel, sets aside 12,000 dirhams to both "the working and the *baṭṭālīn*."[212] Shāhīn gives 1,000 dirhams a year to the shaykh to appoint an unemployed eunuch to be in charge of water distribution to the poor.[213] These provisions often include the requirement of prayer. Mithqāl, the chief of the sultan's barracks, requires that "after each one of them takes his share from the sum he is to recite the *Sura* of Fidelity [from the Qurʾan] thirty times and pray after the recitation for the author of the endowment and for all the Muslims."[214]

On occasion both Citadel eunuchs and already established eunuchs of the Prophet provided funds to set up their own eunuch freedmen in the sanctuary. One of the many merits of Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn Dīnār was that from among his thirty freed people, male and female, "seven of his eunuchs tended the lamps in the *ḥujra*."[215]

In the surviving deed of endowment of the Citadel eunuch ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Qiftjāqī, he provides 2,000 dirhams a year for his eunuch freedman ʿAnbar:

> And there is to be paid out to the *ṭawāshī* ʿAnbar, the freedman of the author of the endowment, in addition to what is specified for the income of the freed people each year, 2,000 dirhams . . . which will be carried to him in noble Madina . . . and the *ṭawāshī* ʿAnbar must stay a resident in Madina and if the *ṭawāshī* ʿAnbar dies to the mercy

> of God or moves to Cairo and takes residence there or in another city, then the amount of the 2,000 dirhams which was designated for the *ṭawāshī* ʿAnbar is to be paid out to two eunuchs from among the eunuchs residing in Madina who have no stipend [*khubz*] among the eunuchs of Madina, to be equally divided between them, and if the *ṭawāshī* ʿAnbar returns to Madina and takes up residence there, the payment goes back to him.

In a later endowment, for unexplained reasons, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf excludes ʿAnbar and transfers his stipend to two eunuchs who must pray for ʿAbd al-Laṭīf and for his manumitter.[216]

The same *zimāmdār*, Khushqadam al-Rūmī, who provided 12,000 dirhams to the "unemployed and working eunuchs" of Madina, had himself been an exile in Madina. In the year of his death he set aside forty gold florins (*īfluriyāt*)[217] to purchase a eunuch for the service of the mosque:

> From the revenue of all of the above and from the revenue of his preceding endowment in guarded Cairo and his property [*rizq*] in the lands of Egypt and Syria: the sum of forty gold florins with which the administrator of the endowment will buy a eunuch [*khādim ṭawāshī*] whom the administrator or his agent will appoint to service in the Noble Sanctuary of the Prophet . . . after the implementation of his manumission as is the custom with one like him. Every year there is to be spent from the aforementioned revenues and from his aforementioned endowment in guarded Cairo and the property in the lands of Egypt and Syria the sum of forty gold florins on the condition that he be devoted to the service of the Noble Sanctuary as is the custom concerning the service of those like him. And if the eunuch dies, it is the responsibility of the administrator to replace him with another eunuch to whom will be paid the same salary from the revenues of all the endowed properties.[218]

Such a eunuch was a true oblate. He "affiliated to the Prophet's threshold" without knowing any other ties of clientage.

The prestige of the eunuch society of Madina rested on the eunuchs' direct contact with the Prophet—on the high rank of the one whom they served and on their increasing control over access to his intercession and to his charisma, the *baraka* which his physical body radiated from within his tomb. Even the dirt and pebbles in the courtyard of the mosque were invested with *baraka*, so much so that they took on living qualities. The historian of Madina, al-Aqshahīrī (d. 1308), recounts a story told him by the chief eunuch of Madina, Mukhtaṣṣ al-Ashrafī:

In the year 715, a man from Syria came to me during the season of the pilgrimage and said, "I made the pilgrimage the previous year and I carried off a bit of dust and pebbles from the [Prophet's] mosque. Since then I have not ceased to see that bit of dust and pebbles in my sleep. It says to me, 'Return me to my place! You have tortured me. God will torture you!' So I have come here with it." Then he produced a purse which had in it what he had mentioned, and we placed it in the mosque.[219]

The tendency of the faithful to remove physical "pieces" of *baraka* from the Prophet's sanctuary is frequently condemned in contemporary texts. In particular, the pious scholars often cite a tradition (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet that the gravel of the *ḥaram* will give witness on the Day of Judgment against those who remove it from the sanctuary. It is not surprising that the chief eunuch of the *ḥaram* would be presented as the source of this particular cautionary tale. His privileged intimacy with the sanctuary precincts makes him an unimpeachable witness, and casting him as narrator authenticates al-Aqshahīrī's account. But the chief eunuch is not only the narrator of this story; he is also a principal actor. The Syrian pilgrim, in his ignorance, attempts a direct and illegitimate route to the Prophet's *baraka*. Punished by terrible nightmares, the transgressor must turn to the chief eunuch to mediate between himself and the offended sanctuary. The chief eunuch has the authority to return the "piece" of *baraka* to its proper place and to restore order, to make things right.

The "eunuchs of the Prophet" often appear in the works of the Sunni historians of Madina as narrators of accounts of retribution, specifically retribution visited on those who violate boundaries within the sanctuary of the Prophet.

And Abū Faḍl Mufīd al-Hamāwī, one of the eunuchs of the blessed tomb, has told me that one year he was sitting on the chest of votive offerings in the mosque [of the Prophet] when along came an elderly visitor to the gate of the enclosure [*maqṣūra*] of the noble tomb. He [the old man] nodded his head toward the threshold like someone who is taking something, and it was as if he wanted to kiss the threshold. Then it [the threshold] seemed to shake him, and suddenly he fell dead. And Mufīd was one of those who witnessed his funeral—may God have mercy on him.[220]

In one of the most powerful anti-Shiʿi statements in the Sunni literature on Madina, it is the Shiʿi community, the favorite scapegoat of the Mamluk authors, which attempts the ultimate violation of the sanctuary.

Al-Samhūdī presents this account with three different chains of transmitters: two of them go back to a named chief eunuch and one to a "eunuch of the *ḥujra.*" In his telling of the account, the chief eunuch is both narrator and witness:

> Hārūn ibn al-Shaykh ʿUmar ibn al-Zaʾib—and he was trustworthy, honest, and well known for his goodness, his upright character, and his piety—has told me the following from his father—and he was one of the great men—he said: "I was a resident in Madina, and the shaykh of the eunuchs of the Prophet at that time was Ṣawwāb al-Lamaṭī. He was an upright man, charitable and kind toward the poor. Between him and me there was a certain familiarity [*uns*]. He said to me one day: 'I'll tell you about a strange occurrence. I had a friend who was one of the companions of the amir [of Madina], and he used to come to me with news of anything which concerned me. On that day he came to me and said: "Something terrible is going to happen today." I said, "What is it?" He replied, "A group of people from Aleppo have come and they have paid the amir a great sum. They have requested that he provide them with someone to open the *ḥujra* so that they can remove the bodies of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. And he has agreed to this." 'Ṣawwāb said: 'I was greatly disturbed by this, and then a messenger from the amir came and requested my presence. I responded and he [the amir] said to me, "O, Ṣawwāb, a group of men will come knocking tonight at the mosque. Let them in and help them with their task. Do not resist them and do not interfere with them." I answered him, "I hear and I obey." I left and I spent the entire day behind the *ḥujra* weeping. My tears did not cease to flow, but I did not indicate to anyone what was the cause. Then, when night fell we prayed the evening prayer and the people left the mosque. We locked the gates and shortly there was a knocking at the gate which is opposite the gate of the amir—that is Bāb al-Salām—for the amir at that time was living in the old fortress. So I opened the door and forty men entered single file. They carried with them . . . baskets and candles and tools for demolition and digging. They walked toward the noble *ḥujra,* and by God, they had barely reached the pulpit when the earth swallowed them all and all the tools they brought with them. No trace remained of them. And the amir waited a long time for news of them. Finally he called me and said, "O, Ṣawwāb, didn't those people come to you?" I said, "Certainly, but such and such happened to them." He said, "Watch what you say!" I answered, "That's what happened. Come look for yourself and see if any of them are left or if there is any trace of them." He said: "Let this affair stop here. And if you spread it

> around, your head will fall." I left him then.' Al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī said, 'When I learned this account from Hārūn, I related it to a group of friends among whom was one whose word I trusted, and he said: "I was present one day with the Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allah al-Qurtubī in Madina and the shaykh [of the eunuchs] Shams al-Dīn Ṣawwāb told him this story. I heard it with my own two ears."' This is the end of what al-Ṭabarī mentions. I [al-Samhūdī] say, Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allah ibn Abī ʿAbd Allah ibn Abī Muḥammad al-Marjānī gives an abridged version of this affair in his history of Madina. He says, "I heard it from my father—that is the Imām Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Marjānī—who told me that he heard it from his father, Abū Muḥammad al-Marjānī, who heard it from a eunuch of the *ḥujra*."[221]

In this story the chief eunuch presents himself as helpless in the face of the amir's temporal power. He does not invoke the power of the sultan or display pious indignation. He merely responds, "I hear and I obey." Although the eunuch is highly instrumental, as witness and narrator, the most important actor in this story is the *ḥaram* itself. It is the eunuchs' proximity to, and to a certain extent their control over, the tremendous forces of the *ḥaram,* of a physical space that can, quite literally, consume human beings, which endows them with their own *baraka,* or charisma.

In the year 702/1303 the pious chief eunuch Kāfūr al-Ḥarīrī, who filled the hearts of the Shiʿi lords of Madina with fear, conceived of a plan for building a fourth minaret for the Prophet's mosque. It would be a great structure which would tower over the Bāb al-Salām, the "Gate of Greeting," through which the faithful entered to perform the ritual visit to the Prophet's tomb. In that same year the two most powerful men in the Mamluk Empire, the viceroy of the sultan, Salār, and his *khushdāsh,* the commander of the Egyptian armies Baybars al-Jashnākīr, made the pilgrimage and *ziyāra* together.

Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn was a boy of thirteen at this time. Recalling these events years later, he would write that Kāfūr had "an affectionate familiarity [*dallīya*] with the two amirs because he had raised them both [*bi-tarbiyatihimā*]. Because of this, they treated him with devoted friendship [*muwāla*] when they made the pilgrimage. So he spoke to them concerning the building of the minaret which stands over Bāb al-Salām today."[222] At first, because of the old bond between themselves and the elderly eunuch, the amirs agreed to undertake the project. But, Ibn Farḥūn tells us, Kāfūr began to suspect that his former charges

would be distracted from this task by their preoccupation with the empire or that they would find the expense of the construction too weighty. So he said to them, "I'm not asking you two for money. I have lamps of gold and silver which will more than suffice to cover the expense."[223] The two amirs promised, for their part, to send him the necessary artisans from Cairo in the next pilgrimage caravan.

After they had departed, Kāfūr hurried to prepare the foundations for the minaret. He mobilized the people of Madina and had stones of all kinds brought to the mosque so that it "seemed as if there were mountains between the Gate of Mercy [Bāb al-Raḥma] and the Gate of Greeting [Bāb al-Salām]." He then ordered the excavation to begin. Given the holy nature of the site, the project soon took on the aura of the sacred.

> Al-Ḥarīrī, may God have mercy on him, supervised all this and expended his own funds and pushed himself and his eunuchs. Then he ordered that anyone in Madina who knew anything about building—such as the architect Shaykh Ibrāhīm and the *farrāsh* Shaykh ʿAlī—and even those who had very little expertise in building, to begin the excavation for the foundations." They dug down until they hit water. They brought some of the water up and Kāfūr drank from it and the people drank after him. They saw that as *baraka* and joy and a good omen for the completion of the task. Then they laid the foundations. When the pilgrimage season arrived, the artisans and workers arrived also with a supervisor who was an expert in building and engineering. The latter, upon viewing the foundations, said to the shaykh: "Why were you in such a hurry? We won't build on this until we demolish it completely. For I do not feel secure about the final outcome." He insisted upon this, and the shaykh, for his part, insisted on leaving the foundations. So the chief engineer went back to Egypt and said, "I fear the outcome and that the fault will be blamed on my craft." The shaykh, unperturbed, said to the workers who were with him: "Do your job. For God Almighty will complete it through the *baraka* of this our generous Prophet." They made it as it is today, and its benefit is widespread.[224]

Kāfūr, like most of the eunuchs of the Prophet, still commanded powerful loyalties from his previous life in the Cairo Citadel. The use of words such as "affectionate familiarity" and "devoted friendship" underscore the very personal relationship between the eunuch *muqaddam* and the mamluks he had raised, and to whom, as young boys, he had stood in the role of father and protector. At first Kāfūr chooses to draw

on these old loyalties. As the project progresses, however, it is his relationship to the Prophet, not to royal power, embodied in Salar and Baybars, which takes precedence. When he refuses the help of the Egyptian engineer, Kāfūr appropriates the *baraka* that infuses even the waterlogged foundations of his minaret.

The eunuchs who entered the "noble service" of the Prophet underwent a kind of sea change. They had known *jāh* (high status) and *ḥurma* (honor) in the realm of worldly power, the *dawla*. Once they entered the sanctuary, however, they acquired a new persona, and the *hayba*, or awe, which they inspired took on a new level of meaning. In the court their *hayba* was augmented by their proximity to the sultan. In the *ḥaram* it was proximity to the Prophet that, more than any other factor, defined their status. They had gone beyond the rank of royal eunuchs, for they had entered a service "more exalted than the service of kings."[225]

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4

Eunuchs, Children, and Time

The Hijaz, and especially Madina, should, of all places in "the two worlds" of heaven and earth, be untouched by change. *Bidʿa* ("innovation," but often mistranslated as "heresy") has always been seen by the pious as a potential threat to the community of Islam. Traditionally, while all but the most conservative Ḥanbalīs have conceded that there might be such a thing as a good *bidʿa*, given certain specific conditions, the word itself is pejorative and loaded with negative connotations, not the worst of which is summed up in the statement that "*bidʿa* is a cause of *fitna*."[226]

It is the temporal component of *bidʿa* that makes it an area of moral tension even for those pious Muslims who do not categorically condemn all innovation as such. For *bidʿa* is change wrought in the context of ordinary, profane time, and thus always carries with it the potential for departure from the *sunna*, the practice of the Prophet, for the warping of that sacred time when God spoke directly to men and women through his messenger. In the "holy land" of the Hijaz, *bidʿa* takes on a new dimension, for any innovation within the boundaries of the "Two Sanctuaries," even a *bidʿa ḥasana* (a "good innovation") is a distortion of both time and space which has profound implications for the believers.

The eunuchs of the Prophet, guardians of the sanctuary of Madina where "God perfected the faith," were clearly a creation in ordinary postprophetic time, established in the tomb of the Prince of God's Messengers as a separate group at least five centuries after his death. In the subsequent course of their long history, however, no attempt was

made either by the eunuchs themselves or by the pious scholars who wrote about them to legitimize their presence in the sanctuary by creating a prophetic myth of origin for them. The words that are consistently used to describe the founding of the eunuch society—such as *ibtikār* (creation) or *ḥudūth* (introduction)—all have the unequivocal meaning of something new and unprecedented. But the word that would seem to be most apt, *bidʿa* (innovation) is strikingly absent.[227]

Despite the tacit acknowledgment by Muslim authors of the "createdness" of the eunuchs, the latter were consistently and paradoxically linked to the Prophet and to his Companions, the pious men and women of the early community, by a spatial and ritual symbolism that was at times subtle and at times quite overt. The elevated platform (*dikka*) on which the eunuchs sat during the day in their ceremonial robes was strategically placed between the threshold of the Prophet's tomb/house and the Gate of Destiny or Gate of Gabriel, the entrance to the sanctuary which was supposed to have been the door through which the Prophet preferred to pass when visiting his family.[228] The platform itself was reputed to be the famous bench or arbor where the "people of the bench" (*ahl al-ṣuffa*), including the legendary early ascetic and scholar of Islam Abū Hurayra, sat and talked with the Prophet.[229] The residence of the chief eunuch, which stood right outside the Gate of Gabriel and marked the beginning of the "eunuch quarter" (*ḥārat al-khuddām* or *ḥārat al-aghāwāt*), was the reputed home of ʿUthmān, the Prophet's close friend and the third of the "Rightly Guided" caliphs.[230] Similarly, the eunuchs' ritual of expelling the believers and locking the doors of the *ḥaram* at night was said to be the practice of ʿUthmān's predecessor, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.[231]

The fourteenth-century diploma of investiture for the office of chief eunuch of the sanctuary, included as a model text in al-Qalqashandī's handbook for government scribes, describes the appointee as having joined the company of the original Companions of the Prophet. The new chief eunuch is associated with both the *muhājirūn* (the Meccan "emigrants," those who made the *hijra* with the Prophet from idolatrous Mecca to Madina in 622 C.E.) and the *anṣār* (the "helpers," or converts of Madina who rallied to the Prophet's cause). The new shaykh has been "preferred [by God] with the capacity to enter the number of those whom He honored with his [the Prophet's] service, those whom He chose for that purpose from among the *muhājirīn* and the *anṣār*."[232]

Such diplomas of investiture were written to be read out loud. This

particular document would most probably have been read in public twice: once in Cairo, where the appointment was made, and again in Madina, where the new shaykh would take up office. The association between the eunuchs and the Muslims of the early community, as well as the eunuchs' privileged control over spatial areas of the mosque, recur throughout the document: the tomb itself, the *rawḍa* or "Garden" between the tomb and the pulpit, and the *maqām jibrīl,* the place where the Angel Gabriel used to stand when he visited the Prophet. These are the leitmotifs of this text, consistent themes that are meant to strike the ear of the listener. Even the "Turk," the mamluk soldier who had never progressed beyond the prayers and the few Qur'anic phrases of Arabic that he learned as a cadet in the Citadel barracks, and the *zuqāqī,* the civilian "alley dweller" of Cairo whose spoken dialect was far removed from the literary Arabic of the Chancery, would hear the repeated use of words that were part of the simplest language of Muslim piety—words that had a direct association with the Prophet and prophetic time.

The eunuch for whom the document was composed was most probably of East African (*Ḥabashī*) origin, and it is thus not surprising that the Companion with whom he is juxtaposed in the document is the saintly figure of Bilāl, the Ethiopian slave who was one of the first converts to Islam. The new shaykh is "the ascetic who prefers living in proximity [*jiwār*] to his Prophet to all else, the humble one who intends by his service [to the Prophet] to be included among the group [*zumra*] of those who served him [the Prophet] in his lifetime."[233]

Any audience would know, however, that Bilāl, a major figure in Islamic piety, was not a eunuch. They would also know that the holy figures of the prophetic period who were evoked by the rituals of the eunuchs and by the spaces they controlled were not themselves eunuchs. Furthermore, the educated person would certainly be aware that the "chosen group who served the Prophet in his lifetime" did not in any way resemble the closed and highly formalized organization of eunuchs.

This temporal double standard applied to the eunuchs is all the more striking in light of the general tone of traditional Arabic literature on Madina. This literature, especially in the Mamluk period, manifests an insistent, almost obsessive concern with the verbal re-creation of the Prophet's original sanctuary. Reading Nūr al-Dīn al-Samhūdī's "Fulfillment of the History of the Home of the Pure One" (*Wafā' al-wafā' fī ta'rīkh dār al-muṣṭafā*), a work that, even in its surviving truncated form,

is perhaps the finest example of the "praising of Madina" genre in Arabic, is somewhat like being pressed into the service of an exacting and driven archaeologist on the site of a major excavation.[234]

By means of words and diagrams, al-Samhūdī forces his reader to strip the sanctuary methodically, layer by layer, in a laborious effort to uncover the "true" *ḥaram,* exactly as it was in the sacred period of the Prophet's lifetime. The whole process is fraught with a sense of moral urgency, which continually brings both author and reader up against the obscuring power of time. Al-Samhūdī, writing some eight hundred years after the Prophet's death and observing a sanctuary that was twice rebuilt after major conflagrations, reveals a terrible uncertainty beneath his expertise as both historian and jurist: Is the "real" *ḥaram,* the place where the "faith was perfected," even there to be recovered?

For al-Samhūdī, the Prophet's grave is the unquestioned center of the sanctuary, but he includes three different diagrams of the possible placement of the grave in relation to the graves of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.[235] As al-Samhūdī and his reader progress through the time-altered *ḥaram,* each layer, each "addition," is carefully catalogued and consigned as closely as possible to its correct temporal place—consigned, as it were, with a trembling hand, for who is to know which additions have crossed the boundary into *bidʿa?* According to tradition, even ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, a model of piety, trembled and wept with fear when he ordered necessary repairs inside the sanctuary.[236]

This verbal stripping away of the layers of the *ḥaram* to its original state, an impossible but constant goal, was meant to be total. Thus, it was not only space that was to be excavated but people, practice, and ritual. As for the eunuch society, the pious scholars did not shut their eyes to the role of the eunuchs as actors within the context of normal, profane time. The chief eunuch Kāfūr al-Ḥarīrī's introduction of lanterns, as opposed to torches, into the ritual of the eunuchs' nightly circumambulation of the sanctuary was, in fact, described by Ibn Ḥajar as a *bidʿa,* but as a "good" *bidʿa.*[237]

By contrast, the planting of date palms inside the mosque by one of the early chief eunuchs at some point in the first half of the sixth/twelfth century was a source of constant tension between the pious scholars and the eunuchs for the next eight hundred years. Shortly after the palms were planted, they acquired a prophetic origin, and the palms became known as the "garden of Fāṭima," a belief that was already widespread when Ibn Jubayr made his ritual visit to the Prophet's tomb in

578/1183.[238] This fiction, a frequently employed device for surmounting the question of *bidʿa,* was quite successful with most worshipers, but it was never accepted by the pious scholars. Despite the learned opposition, the eunuchs unflinchingly maintained that it was the beloved daughter of the Prophet who first planted this grove. The masses of Muslims also stubbornly persisted in believing in the sacred quality of the fruit of palms once tended by the delicate hand of Fāṭima.

For the scholars, who were quite certain that it was not Fāṭima but a eunuch of the sixth/twelfth century who introduced the garden, this was a *bidʿa* of the worst kind, a purposeful alteration of the Prophet's sanctuary. The fact that the eunuchs profited from the dates made this innovation all the more heinous. On more than one occasion the palms withered, an event that never failed to please the scholars. But as fast as the "odious" palms died, they were replanted by the eunuchs and reinvested with the *baraka,* the charisma of Fāṭima, as if she herself had actually touched them.[239]

The fourteenth-century Madinan judge Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn, one of the foremost biographers of the eunuchs of the Prophet, ascribed the planting of the majority of the palms that stood in his own time to the chief eunuch ʿAzīz al-Dawla Rayḥān, whom Badr al-Dīn had known and, in another context, praised for his piety.[240] Similarly, the lexicographer Majd al-Dīn al-Fīrūzābādī, who composed a number of highly laudatory biographies of the eunuchs in rhymed prose, wrote in obvious anger:

> Most of these date palms were planted in his [ʿAzīz al-Dawla's] time. It seems that no one came forward to prohibit this *bidʿa* out of respect for his high position or out of fear of his tongue or in support of his emulation of the one who planted them before him. And he [who supported ʿAzīz al-Dawla] hung from his [ʿAzīz al-Dawla's] neck by the rope of this reprehensible act. Most of these palms were dried up in a violent sandstorm which occurred in the last days of the tenure of the chief eunuch Yāqūt al-Rasūlī. Then they were replanted although one of "the people" [i.e., the important people] opposed it, but his opinion had no weight. And perhaps it may be allowed on the grounds that the first one to plant them may have had some kind of right to do so. But it is no secret that support of such a farfetched possibility comes from lack of fear of God.[241]

Al-Samhūdī adds that a plan, supported by a powerful Mamluk amir, Ṭughān Shaykh, to increase the number of date palms in 870/1466 met

with opposition from the "good people" (*ahl al-khayr*, i.e., the Sunni scholars) and "came to nothing, praise God."[242]

When the British traveler Richard Burton visited the *ḥaram* some four hundred years later, the "garden of Fāṭima" was still there and was still a source of income for the eunuchs.

> It [the garden] now contains a dozen date trees—in Ibn Jubayr's time there were fifteen. Their fruit is sent by the eunuchs as presents to the Sultan and the great men of Islam; it is highly valued by the vulgar, but the Ulema do not think much of its claims to importance. Among the palms are the venerable remains of a Sidr, or Lote tree, whose produce is sold for inordinate sums. The enclosure is entered by a dwarf gate in the south-eastern portion of the railing, near the well, and one of the eunuchs is generally to be seen in it: it is under the charge of the Mudir, or chief treasurer.[243]

The date palm controversy was one of the admittedly rare examples of a clash between the eunuchs and the scholars. Although the latter, with few exceptions, never graced the "garden of Fāṭima" with their approval, their learned opposition was clearly futile. In such matters the eunuchs, by virtue of their perpetual residence in the sacred space of the sanctuary, could draw on a force with which even the most pious scholar could not compete: the *baraka* of their physical proximity to the Prophet, the special *qurb* (closeness) of the eunuchs of the Prophet. Al-Qalqashandī's fourteenth-century model diploma of investiture for the chief eunuch describes the shaykh of the eunuchs as being "one of those who are brought close" (*min al-muqarrabīn*). In the late nineteenth century the chief *muftī* of Madina, al-Barzanjī, wrote a description of the eunuchs which virtually granted them a kind of infallibility by association:

> They live a pleasing life, blessed with the favor of the lord of the Prophets and enjoying the rights of the noble service. As is proper, most of them are known for piety, charity, gravity, and dignity. They deserve respect and good opinion. And if, on occasion, human nature should overcome one of their number and he commits a fault, it should be overlooked, provided it is not a direct violation of the Holy Law, out of respect and honor for the one whom they serve. As the proverb goes: "For the sake of one, a thousand are honored." How could one not do so, seeing that they are the servants of his door, affiliated to his threshold? In truth, their service is more noble than any other kind.[244]

When the eunuchs of Madina "affiliated to the Prophet's threshold,"[245] they entered into a personal and unmediated relationship with the Messenger of God. This relationship, this quality of "closeness," rendered criticism of their "garden of Fāṭima" ineffectual and placed them completely outside the temporal boundaries of *bidʿa*. Although the eunuchs of the Prophet were distinguished from the broader category of eunuchs by their entry into the "noble service" (*al-khidma al-sharīfa*), it was the quality of being a eunuch—of belonging to the *ṭāʾifa* of ambiguity—which best enabled them to fulfill their role as intercessors before the ultimate Intercessor, the Prophet.

The visit to the Prophet's tomb, since it is not formally part of the required pilgrimage, is itself not bound by any temporal imperative. Ibn Taymiyya, a fervent opponent of the cult of the Prophet, often quoted the prophetic tradition, "Do not make an *ʿīd* [festival] out of my tomb."[246] In refutation, his contemporary, the jurist Tāqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, responded that the ritual of the *ziyāra* (the visit to the Prophet's tomb) was not an *ʿīd* because, unlike the prescribed feast days or the pilgrimage to Mecca, it could be accomplished at any time.[247]

Within Ibn Taymiyya's stark and Protestant vision of Islam, linear time, the progression of days, months, and years ordained by God, could be altered by God alone. The Prophet's intercession is decidedly time-bound: he interceded for his community during his lifetime (past), and he will intercede for them again (albeit in a very limited fashion) on the Day of Judgment (future). For most medieval Muslims, however, the words of the fifteenth-century scholar Nūr al-Dīn al-Samhūdī were far more expressive of the Islam they knew and practiced. When al-Samhūdī wrote of the blessings (*khayrāt*) that emanated from the Prophet's tomb, he was describing phenomena that were as concrete as the benefits (*niʿam*) conferred on him by Sultan Qaʾitbay. For al-Samhūdī, the Prophet, the Intercessor, was present in his tomb, ready to respond to the petitions of his community.

> He [the Prophet] is in that noble place, and how often are the occasions of his intercession there [from the tomb] for his community and of his extending his aid to them. . . . Visiting [the tomb] and taking up residence near it are among the best pious acts. Before his tomb, prayers are accepted and requests are granted.[248]

In the literature of the cult of the Prophet, a great emphasis is placed on the *ḥadīth* (tradition) which indicates that the Prophet is, in fact, still

resident in his tomb/household.[249] His body is incorruptible, "for the worms dare not consume the bodies of martyrs."[250] His *baraka,* the essence of his prophetic charisma, is very much alive in his tomb and infuses the entire sanctuary. On occasion he even returns the greeting of peace to pious men who visit his tomb/dwelling (*ḥujra*).[251] The Prophet's death, in time, is not denied. But within his tomb and in the area immediately surrounding it, time is suspended. The sphere of *baraka* becomes the sphere of no-time.

Eunuchs, given their peculiar qualities as a human category, were particularly well suited to serve within this atemporal zone. Like most people of slave origin, eunuchs had been violently uprooted from their past. Their biological parents had been erased along with the names those parents had given them. The anonymity of the patronymic of the first-generation slave, "ibn ʿAbd Allāh," "son of the slave of God," underscores the complete separation from one's parents and ancestors which was in theory a necessary aspect of the "death" of enslavement.[252] The destruction of the past was the first stage in a process of socialization which all slaves—male, female, and eunuch—underwent, and from which many would be "resurrected" through manumission to a new Muslim identity. For the eunuch, however, the "death" of enslavement suffered as a child was succeeded almost immediately by castration. If he survived the physical trauma of the operation, he would enter the Islamic world as a member of an unusual category, removed from the normal cycle of human maturation and deprived of a biological future.

Islamic law divides the life cycle of the individual according to various stages of maturity. The most important moment of the cycle by far is puberty, or *bulūgh* (lit. "readiness," "ripeness"), the physical transformation of the child into a "complete man" (*rajul kāmil*) or a "complete woman" (*marʾa kāmila*), that is, a person with a set sexual identity who is capable of playing his or her appropriate role in society. Once a person is pubescent (*bāligh*/*bāligha*), he or she crosses over the boundary between child and adult and takes on a new legal, moral, and social identity. The signs of *bulūgh* are the physical signs of sexual maturity: the growth of pubic hair, menarche, and the development of breasts in girls; nocturnal emissions, pubic hair, and facial hair in boys.[253]

The eunuch, castrated before adolescence, would never go through the change of *bulūgh*. Because Islamic law, like most sophisticated systems of jurisprudence, also recognized another standard of compe-

tence, intellectual maturity (*rushd*), the free adult eunuch was not condemned to a perpetual state of legal infancy but possessed full legal capacity in most areas of the law. In strictly legal terms a eunuch could thus be *rashīd* (mentally competent), but, on a more profound level, he could never be *kāmil* (complete). Within his own lifetime he was condemned to a strange kind of physical stasis. If he survived the painful urinary tract infections from which eunuchs often suffered, he would grow old as all men grow old. But the aging process would not manifest itself in the cycle of physical changes of "complete" men, the progression from beardless boy (*amrad*) to black-bearded adult, to white-bearded old man. His oddly distorted body, warped by hormonal deprivation, would not age like the bodies of uncastrated men but would only become more wasted and cadaverous with time.

Reproduction, like maturation, is a process that is essentially one of change, temporally defined. The progression from father to son—from one generational cohort to another—is indeed one of the guarantees of social continuity. It is, however, a continuity within time, and thus, no matter how conservative the society, the succession from father to son always carries with it the implication of change. This dual aspect of the biological reproduction of society—the guarantee of permanence and the promise of change—was not lost on Mamluk-period historians such as Tāqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, who wrote of the progress of generations (*al-aqrān*):

> God organized mankind so that one generation would come after the other and each group follow in the footsteps of the former. The first ones would thus leave their stories to those after them as an exhortation and example, and the later one would keep alive the memory and spread the fame of their predecessors.[254]

The eunuchs are outside this process, for "the eunuch does not procreate [*khādim lā yakūn lahu walad*]."[255] Eunuchs are thus, in a sense, outside of time itself. Their lack of any place in the generational progression gives them a peculiar anonymity.[256]

This atemporal quality of the eunuchs stands out dramatically in the texts of the endowment deeds that survive in the archives of Cairo. In most endowment deeds for tomb complexes, which set up paid positions for adjoining mosques, colleges, Qur'an schools, public fountains, and so forth, the positions are generally assigned to specific individuals with the provision that on their death the offices are to pass to their male

children. In the case of eunuch guardians, however, there is a dramatic break. The initial guardians are generally designated, but, after their deaths, the offices simply go to "eunuchs."[257] Thus, while the rest of the tomb complex is the scene of the normal father-to-son progression, the tomb area itself is temporally as well as spatially distinct. It is as if the dead occupants of the tomb and the living eunuchs exist apart, in a kind of static, frozen zone.

The childless eunuchs who occupied this zone were, in one sense, themselves perpetual children, "incomplete" as sexual beings. It is not surprising that in the legends surrounding the Prophet's tomb, children and eunuchs occasionally seem to play almost interchangeable roles. In the food-centered miracle story typical of the medieval Arabic literature on the Prophet's tomb, the spectral *sharīf* or *sharīfa,* who miraculously appears to the starving scholar with food and drink is often a young boy or girl.[258]

Some four hundred years later a very different kind of narrator, the British officer Thomas Keane, recovering from a spear wound in the intense summer heat of Madina in 1881, heard many such miracle tales from the chief eunuch of the sanctuary, whom he describes as "a very old infirm negro, who used to sit for hours telling us stories and traditions of the tomb." A frequent visitor at the house of the amir where Keane, as "Hajj Mohammad," was convalescent, the eunuch told the wounded "Syrian" pilgrim of "the only time the grave of Mohammed has been entered by a living mortal since the Prophet was buried there." The story that Keane records is a variant of the anecdote of the dead cat and the eunuch Badr al-Ḍaʿīf related by the medieval authors.[259]

As in the story of Badr al-Ḍaʿīf, an unpleasant odor begins to emanate from the Prophet's tomb, causing great consternation in the *ḥaram.* But in this version of the story it is not a eunuch but a small child who is sent into the tomb. The child emerges with a dead pigeon, the source of the odor, clutched in his left hand. By all outward signs the boy is healthy and unharmed, but when the people approach him, they discover that he has been struck deaf, dumb, and blind. According to the eunuch who related the story to Keane, the child lived to be an old man and, just before his death, miraculously regained his speech in order to relate what had happened to him.

> When he had entered the tomb he had found it brilliantly lighted, and seen sitting in the middle the Prophet with the Koran on his knees, and

> an angel on each side of him reading to him. The angel on the right of the Prophet rose as he entered and introduced himself as Gabriel, and taking hold of his left hand closed it over the dead pigeon, and showed him out so politely that he never suspected the dreadful calamity that had befallen him until he found darkness on the outside and he had tried to speak.[260]

The Dutch orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgrönje, in his discussion of the elaborate *sarārah,* the "joy feast" celebrated at Mecca for anyone returning from a first visit to the Prophet's tomb in Madina, emphasizes the greater receptivity to the powerful force of the Prophet's *baraka* which children, as opposed to adults, were supposed to enjoy.

> The hands of such children are kissed, their garments touched, and their intercession besought—all this is for the blessing [*baraka*]. From their eyes streams a strange light which recalls the mystic light called "Nur Muhammad," created before the world. "Thy face is light," is said by the congratulators.[261]

In a footnote to this passage, Snouck Hurgrönje also notes that the male child below the age of puberty is without legal obligations and is thus considered to be sinless. "Thus he may be adorned with gold and silver, the use of which for this purpose is forbidden to men, and the festivities on certain occasions in the life of boys are very like those in the life of women."[262]

When the Iraqi lawyer Sulaymān Fayḍī came to Madina from Mecca in 1920, he brought with him a letter of introduction from one of the eunuchs of Mecca ("my brother, my friend, the eunuch of the Noble Sanctuary of Mecca, Aḥmad Agha Ibrāhīm . . . from whom I received kindnesses for which I will be grateful for the rest of my life") to the chief eunuch of Madina, the *mustaslim* of the Prophet's sanctuary. In the letter Aḥmad Agha Ibrāhīm requested of "the shaykh of the Noble Sanctuary and the chief of its eunuchs, His Excellency Ibrāhīm Agha Marjān," that he allow Sulaymān Fayḍī to participate in the *tasrīj,* or evening lighting of lamps in the interior corridor of the *ḥujra.*

On the day that the chief eunuch decided to comply with this request, he told Sulaymān Fayḍī to remain in the sanctuary after the evening prayer had ended and the ordinary believers had left. The careful ceremony that accompanied Sulaymān's temporary inclusion into the eunuch society began with a long waiting period while Sulaymān sat in silence. Then "one of the noble *aghawāt*" came to him carrying the

voluminous wide-sleeved white ceremonial robe of the eunuchs of the Prophet. The eunuch placed this robe over Sulaymān's clothes and then ordered him to remove his hat (*ṭarbūsh*) and told him that he must wear in its place a white turban. At this point "there appeared a small child who had not yet reached ten years of age. He approached me with his turban in his hand and offered it to me, saying, 'Take this and wear it and enter the pure *ḥujra* so that you might be honored and it [the turban] might gain *baraka.*'" Sulaymān accepted the offering, and, clad in the eunuch's robe and the child's turban, silently followed the eunuchs into the corridor of the *ḥujra*.[263]

Like the magical "drei Knaben" of Mozart's *Magic Flute,* who act as neutral messengers between the dangerous and disorderly female world of the Queen of the Night and the sunlit, rational male world of Sarastro, the eunuch/child is an intermediate being, safe in both worlds and belonging to neither. Just as the eunuch moved without danger between the world of men and the world of women, the very young child, as yet not "complete" (*bāligh*) in his or her sexuality, could move between different spheres of physical and moral space with little fear of disturbing the moral harmony of the universe.[264] The similarity between the eunuch and the prepubescent child was not, however, a complete one, and Mozart's "drei Knaben" are in fact much closer to Muslim eunuchs than they are to Muslim children. From a temporal perspective, children carry with them the promise of change. The prepubescent boy or girl is not *bāligh/bāligha* but will be in a few years' time, and will take his or her place in the generational progression of maturation and reproduction. For the child, although his or her sexual identity might be vague and unformed, was and is a gendered creature from birth. Small boys in nineteenth-century Mecca, as Snouck Hurgrönje notes, might be adorned with jewelry, even dressed in "female" clothes. Such apparent androgyny was, however, as much an attempt to camouflage the boy's male identity from the danger of *ḥasad,* or the "evil eye" of envy, as it was a blurring of the signs of gender. Already, by the age of seven or eight, the little boy in most premodern Muslim cities, no matter how much time he spent in the company of women within the household, was being socialized into the public, outside world of men through the *kuttāb,* the neighborhood Qurʾan school. The boy in the story related to Keane, although innocent of any intentional sacrilege, is clearly not a completely neutral (and thus protected) being, for he suffers the loss not

only of his sight—blinded by the very "Nūr Muḥammad" to which, as a child, he is so particularly receptive—but of his speech and hearing as well.

According to Kātib ʿAlī Efendī, Keane's contemporary, when the raiment (*kiswa*) of the Prophet's tomb was to be changed by the eunuchs in a secret ceremony, the eunuchs would enter the *ḥujra* blindfolded:

> No one knows what is between the curtains and the original tomb except for the elder eunuchs. When the *kiswa* of the pure *ḥujra* comes every thirty or forty years from the far reaches of the Ottoman state, the eunuchs enter to hang it up and use a special stairway behind the curtain attached to the pillars of the walls. Only the very old ones from among them enter, and they blindfold their eyes lest they see anything, and they hang up the new curtain. . . . And he who is wealthy among those who go in to hang up the new curtain and remove the old manumits three or four slaves—and some manumit even more—in gratitude for having been favored with [the right to perform] such a service [*khidma*]. And those who can't afford this slaughter four or five rams and give them away as charity.[265]

The eunuchs themselves were clearly the only possible source for the description of this ceremony. Their wearing of blindfolds preserved the *hayba* (dread) that surrounded the tomb of the Prophet and that, by extension, they themselves possessed. Although the eunuchs, like children, were physically weak, they were potentially very powerful, even frightening beings. Unlike the entry into the tomb by the boy in Keane's story, the ceremonial entry of the eunuchs to change the *kiswa* was performed within the structure of ritual. It was also undertaken by individuals who, even if they were "the very old ones" within their society, were members of a human category which, if not ageless, was on one level perceived to be timeless.

In fact, the eunuchs of the Prophet existed simultaneously in two time zones—in ordinary time and in the sacred no-time of the Prophet's tomb. As "servants of the Prophet," in the no-time of the Prophet's household, the eunuchs were ritually anonymous: their ceremonies, their prestige, their ability to mediate the powerful *baraka* which invested even the pebbles and dust of the *ḥaram,* all this was meant to appear immutable. On one level, everyone knew that the eunuchs as an institution were a creation in time and that their society and their ceremonies had changed in the course of time. But since each eunuch was

involved in a direct personal relationship with the Prophet, it was as if, within the sacred space of the *ḥaram*, time were collapsed, or, to be more exact, encapsulated by the *baraka* of the Prince of the Past and the Future, whose charisma, like his power of intercession, defied temporal boundaries.

5

The *Longue Durée* of the Eunuchs of the Prophet

Through Western Eyes

When Eldon Rutter, a British traveler in the Hijaz, made his ritual visit to the tomb of the Prophet in 1925, the aghas, the eunuch guardians, still entered the tomb enclosure in solemn procession every day at dusk to light the great oil lamps which would burn all night in honor of the "Beloved of God."

The lighting of lamps (*tasrīj*) and the evening circumambulation (*ṭawāf*) of the mosque by the aghas to expel all ordinary believers from the sanctuary had constituted the central ritual of the eunuch society of Madina for almost eight hundred years. It was the ceremonial statement of the exclusive relationship of the eunuchs with the "Prophetic Presence" (*al-ḥaḍra al-nabawiyya*), a relationship that existed outside of ordinary temporal concerns in the frozen zone of the sacred.

Some few months prior to Rutter's visit, the City of the Prophet had surrendered to the forces of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān of the Āl Saʿūd (ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz II).[266] While Rutter, as Hajj Aḥmad, stood outside the *maqṣūra*, the brass and iron grating that surrounded the tomb, and recited his salutations to the Prophet under the watchful eyes of the eunuchs, the entire Hijaz was in the throes of a neo-Wahhabi "cultural revolution." From his unofficial capital in Riyadh, the new ruler issued orders intended to transform radically the structure of religious life. The veneration of tombs and shrines and the seeking of intercession from saints and prophets—even from *the* Prophet—had been declared *bidʿa*

(innovation) and would no longer be tolerated. In Madina, however, the eunuch guardians, seemingly impervious to the changes going on around them, continued to maintain the sanctity of the Prophet's tomb and to mediate between the Intercessor and his suppliants.[267]

During the day, clad in their ceremonial robes, the eunuchs controlled access to the *ḥujra,* or "dwelling," the much-adorned and much-venerated structure that enclosed the graves of the Prophet and of the first two "Rightly Guided" caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. Persons of high rank and pious scholars specially favored by the chief eunuch might be allowed to don the distinctive costume of the eunuchs of the Prophet and in silence pass through the first barrier of the *ḥujra* for the evening lighting of the lamps.[268] The sepulchre itself—the charismatic center of the *ḥaram* and of the entire city of Madina—was always covered with the great curtain of heavy black brocade, the *kiswa.* No one but the eunuchs ever passed beyond the *kiswa* and looked upon the tomb. Burton, who made the pilgrimage in disguise in 1853, had been told by the eunuchs that anyone who dared to do so "would be blinded by the supernatural light."[269]

Shortly after sunset the eunuchs walked through the *ḥaram* in solemn procession with great metal lanterns held aloft, to seek out and expel any worshiper who, through ignorance or by design, might presume to remain in the sanctuary after the evening prayer. The gates of the sanctuary enclosure—which included the mosque proper, the *ḥujra,* and the tomb of the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭima—were locked until dawn. Only the eunuchs, servants of the Prophet's threshold, had the unquestioned right to spend the night within these holy precincts.

Rutter's account of his sojourn in the holy cities of Arabia is one of the last of a series of European descriptions of the eunuch society of Madina and of its sister society in Mecca.[270] The latter, although centered around the Kaʿba, appears to have emerged as an important cultic group in the eighteenth century and was often overshadowed by the more prestigious society of Madina. The importance of the relationship with the Prophet was such that the eunuchs of Mecca also took the title of *ṭawāshī al-nabī,* "eunuch of the Prophet," for despite the horror of Wahhabi purists, even the Kaʿba, the "house of God," could not obscure the charismatic power of the tomb/household of the Prophet, the intercessor between God and humankind.[271]

Like previous European travelers to the Hijaz, Rutter was struck by the extraordinary prestige of the eunuchs of the holy cities, a phenomenon that clearly disturbed him. He had an almost visceral reaction to the

sight of "whole men" kissing the hands of these strange, sexless creatures, whom he found "repulsively ugly." His description of their physical appearance—"startlingly emaciated," "tall and terrifyingly bony"—echoes that of earlier European travelers to the Hijaz.[272] Jean Louis Burckhardt, who made the pilgrimage in disguise in 1811, had written:

> The black eunuchs, unlike those of Europe, become emaciated; their features are extremely coarse, nothing but the bones being distinguishable; their hands are those of a skeleton, and their whole appearance is extremely disgusting. By the help of thick clothes they hide their leanness; but their bony features are so prominent, that they can be distinguished at first sight.[273]

The physical appearance of the eunuchs of the holy cities, so anomalous to Europeans, was not, of course, peculiar to eunuchs of the Prophet. The English slave Joseph Pitts, on his way to the Hijaz with his Algerian master around the year 1660, had commented on the eunuchs of Cairo: "They usually grow to a great stature, have an effeminate voice and never have any hair grow on their faces."[274] The difference was that in Madina and Mecca, where eunuchness and holiness merged, the physical appearance of the eunuchs was, to the European observer, perhaps even more disturbing.[275]

Eldon Rutter attempted to explain the existence of the eunuch societies of Mecca and Madina in the simplest functional terms. In his description of the *ḥaram* of Mecca he wrote:

> The reason why eunuchs are specially employed on the Mataf, and for police purposes is, that in the event of a disturbance occurring in which women are concerned, or in the event of a woman appearing on the Mataf in unseemly attire or in a state of uncleanness, they may handle such offenders and expel them without impropriety, as they are not really men in the full sense of the word.[276]

In the same chapter, however, Rutter mentions having seen special guards from the police force of Mecca who were "really men" drive women from the sanctuary with blows of their sticks on the orders of the Muslim Brothers. He may in fact have arrived at this explanation, which does not appear in Arabic descriptions of the eunuch societies of Mecca and Madina until the late 1970s, from neo-Wahhabi informants who themselves were in the process of desacralizing the eunuchs.[277] For Rutter, as for other European observers, the only acceptable explanation for the presence of these honored eunuchs was a sexual one. This

explanation does not, however, occur in European accounts before 1800.

The German soldier Johann Wild, enslaved and converted to Islam by his Ottoman captors, encountered the eunuchs of the Prophet while making the pilgrimage and ritual visit to the Prophet's tomb in 1607. Years later, having returned to Nuremberg and to a Christian identity, Wild would preface his description of the eunuchs of Madina with a discussion of the other functions of eunuchs in Ottoman Muslim society. Although Wild felt that his European readers would find it hard to believe that such "castrated chamberlains" could indeed be honored by "wealthy, noble lords" and themselves hold high positions, his description of the eunuchs remained far more perceptive than that of any European observer who followed him.

Wild begins his discussion in the women's quarters, the Turkish harem, but a few sentences later he takes his reader out of the household realm into the realm of politics and from there into the realm of the sacred. He presents the eunuchs of Madina purely in terms of their ritual role in the mosque, perhaps unconsciously echoing themes from the hagiographic image of the eunuchs first formulated by pious Egyptian scholars in the 1300s:

> There are also a number of black Arabs there [in the sanctuary of Madina]. They are entirely castrated [*die sind ganz verschnitten*] and have no shame [of their condition]. These people are called "Hadim," and wealthy, noble lords render them honor. Also, these castrated Hadim look after the women's quarters of the Turks, for no other male person may enter them except these castrated chamberlains. The emperor has over one hundred of them in Constantinople who are responsible for the women's quarters. They are also made into great lords. The current emperor, Sultan Ahmed, has made such a chamberlain a pasha. He is now the high pasha of Constantinople and is known as Hadim Mehmed Pasha. I myself in my own time, when I came by sea from Alexandria, in the year 1610 in the month of December, have seen him. There are about five or six of these castrated ones in this church [the Prophet's mosque], where they guard the grave of Mahomet. They lie night and day within and do nothing except sing, pray, read, and watch over the donations to the church. They are considered to be holy people, and I was told that they go for three days at a time without even eating a morsel of bread.[278]

The far more laconic Joseph Pitts, a most unwilling pilgrim, ex-

pressed no particular reaction to the prestige of the eunuchs of Madina and mentioned them only briefly in his description of "the tomb of Mahomet, where the corpse of that bloody imposter is laid." Like Wild, however, he saw them in terms of their offices within the tomb:

> There is nothing of his tomb to be seen by any, for reason of the curtains round it, nor are there any of the hagges [pilgrims] permitted to enter there. None go in but the eunuchs who keep watch over it, and they only to light the lamps which burn there by night and to sweep and cleanse the place. All the privilege the hagges have is only to thrust in their hands at the windows between the brass grates and to petition the dead juggler; which they do with wonderful deal of reverence, affection and zeal. My patroon had his silk handkerchief stole out of his bosom while he stood at his devotion here.[279]

In the eighteenth century the German explorer Carsten Niebuhr would attempt to explain the presence of the eunuchs in a far more functional fashion than either Wild or Pitts. His explanation had nothing to do with women. The eunuchs were placed in the mosque, he said, to guard the treasures stored there. The exclusive employment of eunuchs for this purpose, Niebuhr suggested, was due to the fact that since they had no progeny, they would not be tempted to embezzle from the votive offerings: "It is undoubtedly because of these treasures that the tomb of Muḥammad is guarded by forty eunuchs who are not tempted to steal anything from it in order to profit their descendants."[280] Niebuhr's description of the eunuchs as watchmen of the sanctuary comes closer to the tone of the Arabic accounts of the eunuchs of the Prophet, in which they are sometimes referred to as "guarding" (*ḥārisūn*), than does Rutter's. Nonetheless, the eunuchs, who were traditionally perceived as physically weak, were clearly not guards in the literal sense of the word. Despite the ingenuity of Niebuhr's explanation, the most common charge leveled against the eunuchs of the Prophet over the centuries (on the rare occasions when they were subject to criticism) was, in fact, their embezzlement of mosque funds. The absence of offspring did not, as Niebuhr assumed, guarantee fiscal honesty, especially in a society in which the household and family were not defined by biological ties alone.

The fiscal explanation was generally superseded in European accounts of the nineteenth century by the more explicitly sexual interpretation of the eunuchs' role as guards not of the treasures of the mosque but of the women who visited it. Burton stands out among his

contemporaries in his recognition of the ritual role of the eunuchs. In a footnote to his "History of the Prophet's Mosque" he gives three reasons for the presence of the eunuchs in the Prophet's Mosque in Madina:

> In Al-Islam, the employment of such persons about the Mosque is a "*bidʿah*" or custom unknown in the time of the Prophet. It is said to have arisen from the three following considerations: 1. These people are concentrated in their professions; 2. They must see and touch strange women at the shrines; and 3. The shrines are "Harim," or sacred, having *adyta* which are kept secret from the prying eyes of men, and, therefore, should be served by eunuchs. It is strange that the Roman Catholic church, as well as the Moslem Mosque, should have admitted such an abomination.[281]

For Burton the ritual authority of the eunuchs and their equation, in his mind, with Catholic priests was but another proof of their sinister character. In the course of his narrative he repeatedly reminds his readers of the venality of these eunuchs and of the donations they expected and received from visitors to the Prophet's tomb.[282] To Burton the eunuchs appear to have been Stendhalian Jesuits, conscious of the falseness of the "superstitious stories" they spread to the "ignorant populace," and eager to use their office for material gain. Burton's own pet theory was that Muḥammad was not in fact buried in the so-called Prophet's tomb but that the exclusive rituals of the eunuchs and the "superstitious stories" concerning the blinding light emanating from the tomb were all part of a eunuch plot to conceal that fact.

> And lastly, I cannot but look upon the tale of the blinding light which surrounds the Apostle's tomb, current for ages past and still universally believed upon the authority of the attendant eunuchs, who must know its falsehood, as a priestly gloss intended to conceal a defect.[283]

Whatever reasons were construed for the existence of the eunuch societies, European observers of the Hijaz in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were increasingly disconcerted by the presence of these quasi-sacred non-men. Castration provoked a sense of humanitarian outrage—even more so, it would seem, when the victims performed a cultic function. Even Snouck Hurgrönje, who consistently defended Muslim institutions of slavery as he had seen them practiced in Mecca, could not ignore what he termed "this great abuse condemned even by Islam but still maintained." Slaves, he observed, were castrated

for two reasons: to attend wealthy women or "to keep order in the mosques of the holy town." In Mecca most eunuchs fell into the latter category:

> All are imported already castrated, but the demand for this article for the mosque makes Mekka an accomplice in this evil. Among the aghas (eunuch attendants in the mosques) are found Nubians, negroes, Abyssinians, often strongly built, but seldom amiable people.[284]

It was not only the mutilation of young boys that disturbed men such as Snouck Hurgrönje and Rutter. It was the jarring presence of this deliberately created non-man which Europeans found difficult to accept. The eunuchs themselves—haughty and aloof—inspired dislike rather than sympathy. In the context of other European descriptions, Snouck Hurgrönje's characterization of the eunuchs as "seldom amiable people" appears to have been mild. Keane, a contemporary of Snouck Hurgrönje's and an equally vocal apologist for Islamic slavery, had noted that the eunuchs of Mecca possessed "a kind of sanctity by virtue of their office," but added that they "carry long wands with which they make very free play among the crowding or refractory pilgrims, and are veritable jacks-in-office."[285] Domingo Badia y Leiblich, who was present for the annual washing of the Kaʿba in 1804, described the eunuchs of Mecca as making their way through the crowd of worshipers by arbitrarily "striking the people with their fists."[286] Burton similarly described the eunuchs of Madina as "a race of men considered respectable by their office and prone to make themselves respected by the freest administration of club law," while Burckhardt observed that "they affect great importance; and in case of quarrels or riots, lay freely about them with their sticks."[287]

The authority wielded by the eunuchs, their immense wealth, and the visible signs of their high status—especially the kissing of their hands—provoked Europeans to varying degrees of puzzlement and disgust. In Mecca, Rutter could blame the veneration of the eunuchs on "simple" pilgrims:

> Owing to the official standing of the Chief Agha, he and his corps are treated with great veneration by the more simple *hajjis*. I saw a eunuch, sitting on a raised place beneath the cloisters near Bab al-Safa, which is their favorite praying place, summon an Indian *hajji* with a lordly gesture and a brief word. The *hajji* listened to him, and

> grovelling on his knees, kissed the black hand of the Agha and awaited his commands in awed subservience.[288]

He was forced to admit, however, that "the middle-class Mekkans also invariably rise when addressed by an Agha, and treat him in every way as a superior."[289]

By the nineteenth century the majority, if not all, of the eunuchs of the Prophet were of African origin. Rutter, noting a pilgrim kissing "the black hand" of the eunuch agha, echoed the sentiments of earlier nineteenth-century travelers. Burton, describing a banquet he attended in Mecca, vividly recalled the sight of the honored eunuch guest being offered "the highest place and the best pipe" and applying "his blubber lips to a handsome mouthpiece of lemon-coloured amber." Burton, as "Hajj ʿAbd Allah," was expected to defer to this African eunuch, and did so. The Englishman Burton commented later: "It was a fair lesson of humility for a man to find himself ranked beneath this high-shouldered, spindle-shanked, beardless bit of neutrality; and as such I took it duly to heart."[290]

Burton's attempt to portray the African eunuch (who was, in Burton's eyes, not only a non-man but a "black" non-man) as a grotesque and ridiculous creature does not conceal a profound unease. It is not surprising that in Burton's representation of the eunuchs of Mecca and Madina, the warped bodies of the non-men reflect a distorted moral character. The resulting image is, however, far too threatening to be laughable.

> The Agha's character is curious and exceptional as his outward confirmation. Disconnected with humanity, he is cruel, fierce, brave, and capable of any villainy. His frame is unnaturally long and lean, especially the arms and legs, with high shoulders, protruding joints, and a face by contrast extraordinarily large; he is unusually expert in the use of weapons, and sitting well "home," he rides to admiration, his hoarse, thick voice investing him with all the circumstances for command.[291]

In Madina the eunuchs held an even higher status than they did in Mecca. A. J. B. Wavell, who was present in Madina in 1908, when the Turkish garrison was holding off the powerful Bedouin tribal confederation of the Banū ʿAlī, commented on finding several eunuchs calmly seated on the ramparts during a bombardment in defiance of the orders of the Turkish commander. While the fighting was going on, "the

eunuchs, who of course knew all about it, treated us to long dissertations on tactics and strategy generally, and the present campaign in particular." The eunuchs, he commented, "are privileged people in Madina and are treated with great respect . . . which accounted for their being there in defiance of orders."[292] Burckhardt had noted that when the eunuchs walked through the bazaar of Madina, "everyone hasten[ed] to kiss their hands." Ordinary people rose in their presence, and "they exercise[d] considerable influence on the affairs of the town." The chief of the eunuchs of Madina was "addressed as Your Highness, 'Saadetkom,' like a Pasha or a Sharif." When he walked through the streets, a retinue of *farrashūn* (the janitors of the mosque of the Prophet) went before him, armed with long staffs. Other than the amir of Madina, he was the only person in the city to keep horses, a significant statement of his authority. According to Burckhardt, the *agha al-ṭawāshiya,* the chief eunuch of the sanctuary of Mecca, was not as revered as his counterpart in Madina but was nonetheless "a great personage and . . . entitled to sit in the presence of the Pasha and the Sherif." Unlike the eunuch *shaykh al-ḥaram* of Madina, who was appointed from the political center, the *agha al-ṭawāshīya* was elected to his post by his fellow eunuchs.[293]

Burckhardt had seen ʿUmar Ṭuṣūn Pasha himself—the son of Muḥammad ʿAlī, the ruler of Egypt, and in 1811 the effective ruler of the Hijaz—kiss the hand of the chief eunuch of Madina. He tried to explain the status of the latter personage by the fact that he had previously been the *kızlarağası* (agha of the girls), the superviser of the Ottoman royal women and chief eunuch of the Ottoman court:

> The present Sheikh el haram had been formerly Kislar Agassi, or prefect of the women of the Emperor Selym, which is one of the first charges of the court. Whether it was the dignity of his former employ, of which the eastern grandees usually retain the rank through life, even if they are dispossessed of it, or his new dignity of Sheikh el haram, that gave him his importance, I am unable to say; but he took, on every occasion, precedence of Toussoun Pasha, whose rank was that of Pasha of Djedda, and of three tails; and the latter, whenever they met, kissed the Sheikh's hands, which I have seen him do in the mosque.[294]

The French secret service agent Léon Roches, who visited Madina in 1842, was also struck by the authority of the chief eunuch and mistook that personage's former title of *kızlarağası* as being the equivalent of

his title in Madina, *shaykh al-ḥaram* (shaykh of the sanctuary): "The guarding and care of the property of the mosque are confided to black eunuchs. Their chief bears the title of kizlaragasi and shaykh al-haram. He occupies a very high position and is chosen by the Sultan of Constantinople."[295]

Through a Lens Darkly: The Eunuch Image in the Modern Age

Despite the profound impression they made on European observers, the eunuchs of the holy cities do not appear in any of the photographs of the Hijaz taken by camera-toting "pilgrims" such as Rutter and Snouck Hurgrönje. The image of the eunuchs of the Prophet was preserved for posterity by a very different kind of observer, a man who was a contemporary of Snouck Hurgrönje's. Ibrāhīm Rifʿat Pasha, the commander of the guards of the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan in 1901 and the actual commander of the caravan (*amīr al-ḥājj*) in the years 1903, 1904, and 1908, was both a pious man in the traditional mold and a member of a highly westernized elite. When it came to the appropriation of western technology, such as the building of the Hijaz railway in which he played an active role or his own passion for photography, the pasha was very much a man of the "modern" world. Unlike his European contemporaries, however, Ibrāhīm Rifʿat inhabited a moral universe that was still one in which the eunuchs of the Prophet, far from being seen as a perverse disruption of the gendered order of humanity, were simply taken for granted.

In his monumental work *The Mirror of the Two Sanctuaries* (*Mirʾāt al-ḥaramayn*), along with photos of railways, rifle-carrying soldiers, and the telegraph station of Mecca, the pasha included three photographs taken in Madina of eunuchs of the Prophet. Two of the photographs are of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Agha, who is identified as one of the official doorkeepers of the four entrances to the Prophet's *ḥujra*—a position that, given the physical proximity to the actual sepulchre, was one of considerable prestige. One photo, taken from a distance, shows ʿAbd al-Laṭīf seated in the "Garden," the area of the mosque between the *ḥujra* and the Prophet's pulpit.[296] The other photograph is a close-up portrait. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Agha, formally posed and wearing his high white *kavūk* (the elaborate turban which was part of the eunuch's ceremonial costume under the Ottomans), is seated in a chair. His wasted hands

("those of a skeleton") are barely visible beneath the great sleeves of his ceremonial robes. Huge eyes, sunken into the sockets, are the most prominent feature of his face. Unlike the younger eunuch Ḥasan Agha al-Bukhārī, an oblate sent to the mosque by one of the amirs of Bukhara, a eunuch whose solemn, smooth-cheeked face still retains some fullness in the pasha's photograph, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Agha is the embodiment of that "startlingly emaciated" physical type which so repulsed and, on some deep level, intimidated Eldon Rutter.[297]

Another surviving photograph, taken in either 1888 or 1891 by Doctor Saleh Soubhy, health inspector of Cairo and Inspector General of the Health, Maritime, and Quarantine Council of Egypt, shows three eunuchs of the Prophet posed around the Ottoman governor of Madina, who at that time had also appropriated the title *shaykh al-ḥaram*. The caption mentions only the governor, Shawkat Pasha. Unlike Ibrāhīm Rifʿat Pasha, Doctor Soubhy, who had received his medical training in Paris, was writing in French for a European audience. He had been delegated by the Khedive ʿAbbās Ḥilmī II in 1888 and again in 1891 to investigate the sanitary conditions of the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan. His unofficial account of his experiences in the Hijaz, *Le pèlerinage à la Mecque et à Médine*, is a carefully composed defense of Islam, presented as a gift to the khedive but aimed at a broad European audience.

Given his explicitly stated desire to make Islam palatable to his French friends and colleagues, it is not surprising that Soubhy should almost completely exclude eunuchs from his treatise. He mentions the eunuchs of Mecca only in passing. When he describes the keeper of the keys to the Kaʿba, the head of the Shayba family, he says, "Some thirty eunuchs assist him in the different functions of his ministry."[298] He is completely silent on the far more important eunuch society of Madina, the non-men whose cultic role had inspired so much reverence in ʿUmar Ṭusūn, the great-great uncle of the current khedive.

ʿAbbās Ḥilmī himself, educated in the Theresianum in Vienna, would make the pilgrimage and ritual visit to Madina in 1909 and would reverently don the costume of the eunuchs of the Prophet to participate in the evening lighting of the lamps. The account of his pilgrimage, written in Arabic by Muḥammad Labīb Bey al-Batanūnī, contains frequent references to the eunuchs, who appear, as they do in the work of Ibrāhīm Rifʿat Pasha, as the unquestioned guardians of the sanctuary of the Prophet.[299]

Doctor Soubhy, perhaps in deference to Shawkat Pasha, included this

striking photograph, which he himself had taken, of three of the eunuch guardians posed around the pasha, who is seated in a chair.[300] One eunuch, wearing a ring on his right hand, his robe belted with the long embroidered sash that was part of his ceremonial attire, stands by the side of the pasha. Two others, their bony hands barely visible beneath their voluminous sleeves, are seated on carpets on either side of him. The photo itself—in which the appearance of these three anonymous eunuchs contrasts so sharply with that of the bearded Shawkat Pasha—is testimony to Burckhardt's observation that the eunuchs could be "distinguished at first sight." Tall, beardless, wearing a distinctive attire, and displaying an "air of supermundane aloofness," as Rutter had noted, they were unmistakable.[301]

In 1925, by which time ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Agha had presumably gone to his final resting place in al-Baqīʿa, the ancient cemetery of Madina which adjoined the *hārat al-aghawāt,* or eunuch quarter of the city, the eunuchs of the holy cities—especially those of Madina—had suffered what appeared to be a serious economic blow. The outbreak of World War I, the Arab revolt in the Hijaz, and the Wahhabi revolution and political upheavals throughout the Middle East had meant the end of the annual subsidies from Istanbul and the disruption of the pilgrimage. The livelihood of all individuals connected to the Two Sanctuaries had been tenuous for some time. In 1903 seven hundred individuals, including twenty-five eunuchs, held subsidized or endowed positions in the *ḥaram* of Mecca, as did 1,180, including fifty-seven eunuchs, in the *ḥaram* of Madina.[302] At the time of Rutter's visit ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had reduced the support for Mecca and had cut all funds to the Prophet's tomb. In Mecca the eunuchs themselves took the initiative of sending a member of their society to collect the revenues of their endowed land near Basra—revenues that normally came with the pilgrimage caravan. In Madina, however, where the cult of the Prophet was the particular object of Wahhabi indignation, Rutter was told that the eunuch *khāzindār,* or treasurer of the sanctuary, had nothing to do, for "now no money comes, from Stambul or elsewhere."[303] Despite these difficulties, the eunuchs themselves appeared completely indifferent to the changes occurring around them:

> The eunuchs of El Medina were outwardly as unaffected by changes of fortune, and as aloof, as those of Mekka. They never solicited alms, though nearly everybody else in the city did so at one time or

> another; only, if money were offered to them, they would receive it with the air of one who collects money for some charity in which he has no particular interest. It is commonly believed that the Aghas possess great riches which are secreted in their dark houses adjoining Bab Jibril.[304]

Apart from the rumored wealth of the eunuchs, they had other reasons to be confident of their survival. The high status of the aghas—especially in Madina—had been an integral part of life in the holy cities for centuries. Rutter himself believed they would persist, for, despite their diminished numbers, they continued an active policy of recruitment. When he made his *ziyāra,* there were a number of eunuch novices in training in Madina.

> The corps of Aghas in El Medina formerly numbered fifty. I doubt whether there were more than thirty of them employed in the Mosque at the time of which I write; but there was evidently no intention of allowing them to become extinct, as they had a number of little black boys in their houses who must have been recently purchased by or presented to them. These youths spent their time in study and in serving the elders, preparing to enter the Mosque service when they should arrive at years of discretion.[305]

In Mecca he had also noted that despite the suppression of the slave trade, the chief agha was still purchasing small African boys to serve as novices. The boys were castrated before being exported to the Hijaz "as owing to the hazardous nature of the mutilation, the chief of the Aghas will not purchase them until they have safely undergone it."[306] A special establishment was maintained for their novitiate in the eunuchs' quarter in Mecca:

> They [the eunuchs] all live together in the quarter of al-Hajla, at the junction of Suk es-Saghir and El Misfala; and here the young boys live together in a large house, where they are instructed by the elders in religious matters and in their proper duties.[307]

In 1811 Burckhardt had also noted the eunuch novitiate in Mecca. There were some twenty boys who "live together in a house, till they are sufficiently instructed to be given in charge to their elder brethren, with whom they remain a few years and then set up their own establishments."[308]

Even though ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's representative, the judge Ibn Bulayhid, had openly insulted the authority of the aghas by demanding entrance to

the *ḥujra* "at any hour in which he might choose to visit it" and had followed up on this demand by inspecting the *ḥujra* at midnight, the eunuchs had history on their side. In 1804 they had survived a much more violent Wahhabi attack. Saʿūd ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the first Wahhabi conqueror of Madina, had violated the *ḥujra* itself, laid a heavy fine on the chief eunuch, and exiled most of the eunuch society to Yanbūʿ.[309] He had also struck at the heart of the veneration of the Prophet and thus at the eunuchs of the Prophet by prohibiting the *ziyāra* to the Prophet's tomb. When the eunuchs—along with a host of religious scholars—were driven out of Madina, the Portuguese traveler Badia y Leiblich had just set out from Yanbu with a party of pilgrims who were determined to undertake the *ziyāra* in defiance of the Wahhabi prohibition. He and his companions were arrested by a Wahhabi patrol and, on the route back to Yanbu, themselves under guard, encountered the caravan of exiles.

> They informed me that the Wehhabites had destroyed all the ornaments of the sepulchre of the Prophet, and that there remained absolutely nothing; that they had shut and sealed the doors of the temple; and that Saaoud had taken possession of the immense treasures which had been accumulating for so many ages. . . . The caravan had a safe passport from Saaoud, to be respected during its journey; however, according to the information I received, I found that it had been obliged to quit the road after leaving the holy city, and that a heavy contribution had been laid upon it; so much so, that the aga or chief of the negroes, had been obliged to pay for his share the value of three thousand francs, and the others in proportion.[310]

After the defeat of Saʿud's son ʿAbd Allah by Egyptian forces and the reassertion of Ottoman power in the Hijaz, the *ḥaram* of the Prophet had been restored to its former glory and the eunuchs had returned. The brief suzerainty of Saʿud ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and of his son ʿAbd Allah appears to have had little long-term effect on the religious structures of the holy cities. Al-Barzanjī's father had been among the Madinan *ʿulamāʾ* who were marched with the aghas to Yanbūʿ in 1223/1804 and who had been forced to seek refuge outside Arabia. His son, born in Iraq ("in the land of the Kurds"), a child of exile, first came to Madina in 1271/1854 as a young man. Some thirty years later the *sayyid* al-Barzanjī, now the Shāfiʿi chief *muftī* of Madina, recalled his first impressions of the city of his fathers and wrote a glowing paean to the tomb-mosque of "the prince of the future and of the past" and to the eunuchs who guarded it. In 1271/1854, at a time when the young al-

Barzanjī was seeing, for the first time, the "noble sanctuary" which he had heard about from childhood, the eunuchs appeared to have returned to their rituals, their wealth, and their prestige, almost as if the Wahhabis had never existed.[311]

Unlike Saʿūd ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the first Wahhabi conqueror of the Hijaz, whose radical policies in Madina had probably contributed to his political failure, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz II had from the beginning taken a more cautious approach to the volatile issue of the Prophet's tomb. The new ruler did not prohibit the *ziyāra*—although the ritual was altered to prevent any overt signs of veneration of the Prophet—and he did not exile the eunuchs or the other functionaries of the sanctuary. The eunuchs, with eight hundred years of ritual continuity behind them, had every reason to be indifferent to what must have appeared to them to be simply another period of temporary difficulty.

In 1935 a resident historian of Mecca, Husayn ʿAbd Allah Baslāmah, wrote a long description of the organization, rituals, and ranks of the *aghawāt* of Mecca, "the *khuddām* of the Glorious Kaʿba," and mentions, with no trace of disapproval, that in all their activities "they have an order [*niẓām*] which is peculiar to them and in accord with their ancient customs."[312] A year earlier, however, Lady Evelyn Cobbold, a convert to Islam and an official guest of the Saudi state, assured her readers that, although she had seen some thirty eunuchs in the mosque of Madina, "in a few years they will cease to exist." She also took great pains to present the very existence of eunuchs as an "innovation"—neither Arab nor Islamic—which was to be blamed on the villainous Umayyads and on the Christian Greeks, "who practised the horrible trade of mutilation and trafficked in the victims of their greed." Her total silence on the cultic role of these eunuchs in Madina may reflect the ideology of the new regime.[313]

Despite Lady Evelyn's pious condemnation of the archetypal Greek slave merchants, it was certainly not the phenomenon of slavery (which was not abolished by King Faisal until 1962) which a neo-Wahhabi state would have found most objectionable. From their very origins, the eunuch societies had been associated with the widespread cult of the Prophet—an expression of so-called popular Islam which, for centuries, had held a profound appeal for both educated and uneducated Muslims. In the eyes of the Wahhabis, however, the veneration of the Prophet was idolatry, and those who were guilty of such a transgression merited death.

It was not so much their eunuchness as what these specific eunuchs constructed—the whole fabric of ritual used to separate and sanctify the Prophet's tomb—that, according to the ideology of the new regime, was *bidʿa*, or "innovation." Likewise, the prestige and the quasi-sacred status that the eunuchs themselves enjoyed as the guardians of the spatial and temporal boundaries between the Prophet, the Intercessor, and his suppliants could not be tolerated by a movement whose founder had asserted that "it is *shirk* [polytheism] to seek intercession from any but God."

In the 1930s the eunuchs of the Prophet and their counterparts in Mecca begin to disappear from accounts of the Two Sanctuaries. Some of the eunuchs whom Rutter saw in 1925 continued to hold office in the mosque of Madina. They were, however, no longer described in the sources as "priests of the temple," but were presented as artifacts of the ancien régime.

One could see the twentieth-century crisis of the eunuch societies as the posthumous triumph of the thirteenth-century scholar Ibn Taymiyya, who—at a time when the eunuch society of Madina was rapidly expanding and sultans were establishing eunuch guardians in their own tombs in Cairo—was writing unheeded epistles to the Mamluk sultan urging him to suppress the visiting of tombs in general and the cult of the Prophet in particular. In his own time Ibn Taymiyya represented a minority opinion among the religious scholars of the Mamluk Empire. It was, in fact, his academic colleagues in Cairo and Damascus—Sunni scholars such as Tāqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, a learned proponent of both the visiting of tombs and the seeking of intercession from the Prophet—who brought about Ibn Taymiyya's disgrace and imprisonment. Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, however, saw Ibn Taymiyya as one of the few true Sunni interpreters of the school of Ibn Ḥanbal. The cult of the eunuchs—those ritual aspects of the broader cult of the Prophet over which they had acquired exclusive control—was in essence a tomb-centered cult and would thus have been anathema to neo-Wahhabi reformers.

In addition to what was, from a Wahhabi perspective, the heretical nature of the rituals practiced by the eunuchs, the eunuch societies had from their inception been identified with a political center outside the Hijaz—first with Cairo, then with Istanbul. Under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks, the prominent eunuchs of the society had come "from the doors of the Sultan" in the Cairo Citadel. Throughout the Ottoman

period many of them came from the sultan's palace in Istanbul. The Āl Saʿūd, a local dynasty which had come to power on a strong anti-Turkish ideology, might well have perceived these former members of the Ottoman household as a kind of fifth column in the holy cities.

Despite these political and spiritual concerns of the new rulers of Arabia, an institution that had been so integral to the religious life of Muslims for centuries could not immediately be made peripheral. The veneration of the Prophet, although suppressed, did not in fact disappear in the Hijaz. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz seems to have realized that an attempt to eliminate the cult of the Prophet completely would have been both difficult and dangerous. Some of the practices—such as the lighting of lamps inside the *ḥujra*—which were connected with the eunuchs and initially condemned as *bidʿa* have been tolerated up to the present day. The lamps, however, are now electric lights that require not the *maʿrifa makhṣūṣa,* the "special skill," of the eunuchs, but only the flick of a light switch.[314]

Although it is true that the eunuchs had been connected historically with an external sultanate and—under both the Mamluks and the Ottomans—with a Turkish-speaking political elite, they had also shown that they could transfer their allegiances quite smoothly. A local ruler such as King Ḥusayn, one of the leaders of the "Arab revolt," had apparently not been disturbed by the Ottoman past of the eunuchs. Whatever their former affiliations might have been, the primary affiliation of the eunuchs in the Hijaz was to the Prophet, a status that had traditionally placed them outside overt political conflicts.

One could argue that, like the royal eunuchs of the disbanded Ottoman household who pooled their funds in 1924 to buy a house in Istanbul—a kind of eunuch pension where they lived out their remaining years in communal obscurity—these "holy" eunuchs had become anomalous.[315] The highly impressionistic account of the pilgrimage experience by Emel Esin in the 1950s contains a visual description of a surviving eunuch of the Prophet which conjures up the image of a dying order:

> The stranger, wondering how to proceed to the mausoleum at the south-eastern corner, accosts a tall elderly African eunuch, wearing the long-sleeved coat and voluminous turban of the eighteenth-century Ottoman court. The old man's emaciated hand leans for support on the shoulder of a young page. But the eunuch looks at the visitor with a vacant expression and a sweet smile, mumbling incomprehensibly.[316]

Senile and blind, with his "vacant expression and a sweet smile," this ancient eunuch may well have been, as a young man, one of the haughty guardians of the Prophet's tomb who so disturbed Eldon Rutter in 1925.

As late as 1979 Muhammad ʿUmar Rāfiʿ, the author of a detailed description of the "manners and customs" of his native city, felt compelled to explain the word *agha* to his non-Meccan readers.

> *Al-aghawāt* is the plural of *agha*, which, according to the customary language of the Meccans, means "eunuch." It is a Greek word which means "guardian of the bed," and the eunuch is the castrated male. There are a group of these *aghawāt* in the Masjid al-Haram and in the prophet's Noble Ḥaram.[317]

Rāfiʿ maintains that the eunuchs were originally placed in both Mecca and Madina "to oversee the affairs of women." In keeping with his incorrect derivation of the Turkish *agha* as a "Greek word," Rāfiʿ argues that "the custom of employing eunuchs is an ancient one which the Ottomans learned from the Greeks when they conquered Constantinople."[318] Despite his clear disapproval of castration, an "inhuman" practice which he claims "the Muslims inherited from foreigners," and his assurances to his readers that "their [the eunuchs'] numbers are decreasing both in the Masjid al-Haram and in the Masjid al-Nabawi because of the successful abolition of slavery in most countries," Rāfiʿ goes on to state:

> The *aghawāt* of Mecca and Madina have special traditions and stipends and rules [*qawānīn*] and a special costume as well. . . . They have a *shaykh* from among themselves and a deputy [*naqīb*] and ranks in the service which I do not know. . . . The wealthy Muslims and sultans made tremendous donations to them. . . . [M]any have also bought property and put it into *waqf* for them so that they have come to have an abundance of wealth beyond that which is assigned to them by way of salary from the government. . . .[319]

In the early 1970s an Iranian professor made the *ziyāra* to Madina after completing the pilgrimage to Mecca. Three eunuchs still maintained their post on the *dikkat al-aghawāt*. The professor was told, however, that they were government-appointed *sadanat* (guardians), not of the tomb of the Prophet but of the mosque proper, which, according to Wahhabi doctrine, should be the sole object of the believer's visit to Madina. In the course of the professor's own *ziyāra*, he witnessed the unhappy experience of an unlettered Shiʿi pilgrim who recited by rote,

alto voce, the Shiʿi formula for salutation of the Prophet. One of the eunuchs, despite his advanced years, leaped down from the *dikka* and began to beat the unfortunate pilgrim with his long staff while the visitors to the mosque watched in a state of shock. Finally, a Sudanese pilgrim cried out, "Shame!" in a loud, thunderous voice, and the eunuch desisted and returned to his post.

The eunuch of this anecdote is not the senile, blind figure with a "vacant expression" and "sweet smile" described by Emel Esin. He is far more resonant with the awe-inspiring eunuchs of Mamluk Madina whose anti-Shiʿi mission was an essential element in their literary representation.

Epilogue

In 1990 the Saudi magazine *al-Yamāma* published an interview with Sālim Farīd, the official in charge of the "affairs of the *aghawāt*" of Mecca. According to this interview, fourteen eunuchs still served at the sanctuary of Mecca and seventeen at the sanctuary in Madina. Much of the interview is devoted to a discussion of the great wealth of the eunuchs. "Yes, they are very rich," says Sālim Farīd. "God has deprived them of sensual pleasure in the world but he has enriched them with material possessions and, before that, with the honor of serving the Sacred House."[320]

According to this interview, the Saudi monarchy has repeatedly confirmed the independence of the eunuchs of Mecca in the exercise of "their customs and traditions" and in their rights to their considerable income from centuries of endowments. Little mention is made of the eunuchs of Madina except for the observation that, unlike the eunuchs of Mecca, they control their own funds and have no separate official in charge of their affairs.

The most important characteristic ascribed to the eunuchs in this modern context is their lack of *shawa,* or sexual desire. It is this lack of desire, Sālim Farīd points out, which enables the eunuchs to police women in the sanctuary. Paradoxically, they attain that state and the "honor of serving the Sacred House" through the actions of the "bestial people" who castrated them. The "bestial people," according to Sālim Farīd, were Italian soldiers in Mussolini's army who made a habit of castrating Ethiopian captives.[321]

The eunuchs of Mecca, the subjects of the article, remain silent. Sālim Farīd speaks for them and, in brief asides, for the eunuchs of Madina. It is clear that the societies still exist. In this respect Eldon Rutter would appear to have been a better prophet than Lady Evelyn Cobbold. But there is no doubt that their role has changed. Whatever their increase in material wealth, their symbolic wealth has been greatly diminished. They no longer define and mediate multiple boundaries in a moral and political landscape which includes both the living and the dead. Their modern representation narrowly defines their role as that of sexual police—neutered guardians of morality. As for the eunuchs themselves, they continue to maintain their dignified silence.

NOTES

1. Carl Brockelmann's brief entry "al-Ghuzūlī" in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples,* 4 vols. and Supplement (Leiden, 1913–38), incorrectly describes al-Ghuzūlī as "an Arabic writer of Maghribi origin." This entry is reprinted in the second edition, *Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden, 1954–in progress). In subsequent references the first and second editions of the *Encyclopedia* will be cited as *EI* (1) and *EI* (2). Al-Sakhāwī (831/1427–902/1497) describes ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bahāʾī al-Dimāshqī al-Ghuzūlī, who "compiled a book of *adab* which he called *Maṭāliʿ al-budūr fī manāzil al-surūr,*" as a Turkish slave ("*kānā mamlukan turkīyan*") who had been purchased, raised, and educated in Damascus by one Bahāʾ al-Dīn. He was a friend of al-Sakhāwī's shaykh, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who mentioned him in his *Muʿjam al-mufaḥras* and described him in this manner: "He came to Cairo many times and he was a person of excellent taste who was well loved by the possessors of taste. . . . He was devoted to poetry and would not cease from his efforts—getting up and then sitting back down again—until his verses were good. His life, however, was not a long one." See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ fī ʿayān al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, 12 vols. (Cairo, A.H. 1353–55), 5:254, no. 855. The only printed edition of the *Maṭāliʿ al-budūr,* to my knowledge, is the Bulaq edition of A.H. 1299–1300 in two volumes. Brockelmann, in his *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur,* 2 vols. (Leiden, 1937–42), 2:55; *Supplementbände,* 3 vols. (Leiden, 1943–49), 2:68, repeats the same error regarding al-Ghuzūlī's origins ("berberischer Herkunft") but correctly describes him as a student of the grammarian al-Damāmīnī. Subsequent references to the original *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* will be cited as *GAL* (1), and references to the three revised volumes will be cited as *GAL* (2). On Ibn Ḥajar (773/1372–852/1459), see Franz Rosenthal in *EI* (1), s.v. "Ibn Hadjar."

2. For a discussion of the genre of belles lettres or *adab* in Arabic literature, see *EI* (2), s.v. "adab." The self-conscious nature of al-Ghuzūlī's unusual approach is apparent in his introduction, where he discusses his use of the house

as a structure for his text and, as it were, invites his fellow scholars and litterateurs in through the door.

3. "*Fi'l-khadam wa'l-dihlīz.*" The word *khādim* (lit. "servant"), with both the plurals *khadam* and *khuddām*, is synonymous in the *Maṭāli' al-budūr* with the words *khaṣī, khiṣyān,* "castrated one," and with the more formal title for eunuchs, *ṭawāshī, ṭawāshiya.* For a thorough discussion of terminology for eunuchs in Mamluk sources, see David Ayalon, "On the Eunuchs in Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 84ff., and "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 267–69, n. 1a.

4. "*Mā bayna al-bāb wa'l-dār.*" Al-Ghuzūlī repeats verbatim the definition of *dihlīz* found in the standard medieval Arabic dictionaries. See Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), *Kitāb lisān al-'arab,* 20 vols. (Cairo, 1985), s.v. "*dihlīz,*" subsequently cited as *Lisān;* cf. Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1414), *al-Qāmūs al-muhīṭ w'al-qāmūs al-wasīṭ* (Cairo, 1952), s.v., "*dihlīz.*" The word is of Persian origin and can also mean the vestibule of a tent or the tent of the sultan. See Edward Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon,* 8 vols. (London, 1862–93), s.v. "*dihlīz,*" and R.P.A. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes,* 2 vols. (Leiden, 1881; rpt. 1927, 1960). In the Geniza documents the term *dihlīz* refers to the vestibule of dwellings. As S. D. Goitein points out, the entrance hall of houses in medieval Cairo and Fustat was often angled so that outsiders could not see into the home. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society,* vol. 4, *Daily Life* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 47–82, esp. pp. 62–63. In Mamluk endowment deeds describing various kinds of buildings, *dihlīz* is often used as the term for the angled corridors (other than the vestibule) which were essential architectural elements in Mamluk structures. Another Persian word, *darkāh,* is more commonly used to refer to the vestibule area. In Mamluk chronicles *dihlīz* is used to refer to the sultan's tent, to the vestibule of a building, and to angled corridors. In this same genre of sources, *darkāh* also appears frequently as a synonym for *dihlīz* and, at times, replaces the latter word altogether. For a list of references to the use of the term *dihlīz* in medieval Arabic linguistic and philological sources as well as examples from Mamluk documents, see Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Laila A. Ibrāhīm, *Architectural Terms in Mamluk Documents* (Cairo, 1990), p. 49.

5. Al-Ghuzūlī, 1:23–28; cf. Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ibshīhī (d. 814/1411), *Kitāb al-mustaṭraf fī kulli fann mustaẓraf,* 2 vols. (Bulaq, 1371/1952) 1:92.

6. Al-Ghuzūlī, 1:35. Yaḥyā ibn Khālid, whom al-Ghuzūlī frequently makes use of as an authority, is the famous Yaḥya ibn Khālid al-Barmākī, the ninth-century vizier of the 'Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. See *EI* (2), s.v. "al-Barmākī." The Yaḥyā ibn Khālid who appears in al-Ghuzūlī's "Dwelling of Joy," however, is not the historical person but the legendary figure, possessed

of fabulous wealth and an endless font of practical wisdom. This figure would have been familiar to al-Ghuzūlī and his contemporaries not only from literary works but also from popular tales such as *The Thousand and One Nights.*

7. Symon Simeonis, *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hibernia ad Terram Sanctam,* ed. and trans. Mario Esposito (Dublin, 1960), pp. 72–73. The biblical quotation given by Symon is from Genesis 28:17. The quotation from Arnold von Harff is taken from his comments on Cairo, which he visited in 1497: "The houses in this town of Cairo are very ugly outside and badly built, but inside the houses are very fine and beautiful and covered with gold. They are paved with exquisite little marble stones of all colors mixed together and worked with fine histories and flowers, so that you can see yourself reflected in the pavement." Arnold von Harff, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff,* trans. Malcolm Letts (Wiesbaden, 1946), pp. 111–12. I have quoted Letts's translation. Over a hundred years later, the monk Felix Faber, who traveled through Egypt in 1484, echoed similar sentiments. He conceded that the mosques, the palaces, and the mansions of the great were impressive. But the residential houses of Cairo were "outside, extremely poor and unsightly, badly made of bricks and mud but inside they are fine and well-ordered and both mansions and small dwellings are ornamented with different pictures made of marble or gypsum." See *Fratris Felicis Fabri Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti Peregrinationem,* ed. C. D. Hassler, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1843), 3:82. The Venetian envoy Domenico Trevisan (who accompanied the Doge's embassy to Sultan Qanṣawh al-Ghawrī in 1512) also commented on the "miserable appearance" of the exteriors of the houses of Cairo. Like Faber and von Harff, he was impressed by the mosaic floors, "for there are few houses in which you do not see mosaics." See Charles Schefer, ed., *Recueil de voyages et de documents pour servir à l'histoire de la géographie depuis le XIIIe jusqu'à la fin du XVIe siècle,* vol. 5, *Le Voyage d'Outremer de Jean Thenaud, suivi de la relation de l'ambassade de Domenico Trevisan auprès du Soudan d'Égypte* (Paris, 1884), p. 213. For an account of decorated vestibules in Mamluk architectural documents, see Mona Zakarya, *Deux palais du Caire médiéval* (Marseilles, 1983), p. 11, l. 19; p. 52, l. 20; p. 28, fig. 5; p. 70, fig. 4.

8. On the arched monumental entryway (*bāb muqanṭar*), see Amīn and Ibrāhīm, *Architectural Terms,* p. 18. See also Jacques Revault, Bernard Maury, and Jean Garcin, *Palais et maisons du Caire du XIVe au XVIIIe siècle,* vols. 1–4 (Cairo, 1975–83). Al-Ghuzūlī himself does not discuss the form of the *bāb* or its appearance but is more concerned with its social significance as a point of access.

9. For al-Ghuzūlī's discussion of slaves and free women, see 1:258–80.

10. Tāj al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Subkī (727/1327–771/1370), *Kitāb muʿīd al-niʿam wa-mubīd al-niqam,* ed. David W. Myhrman (Leiden, 1908; rpt. New York, 1978), p. 56. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, from a

renowned family of legal scholars, is better known for his great prosoprographical study of the Shāfʿī school of Islamic law, *Tabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā,* 10 vols. (Cairo, A.H. 1324), and his two abridgments of this work. See David Myhrman's introduction to the *Kitāb muʿīd al-niʿam* and his biography of al-Subkī (pp. 8–59). See also Brockelmann, *GAL* 2:108–10; 105–7. Tāj al-Dīn's suspicion of elderly women as possible "agents of debauchery" (*arbāb al-fujūr*) is an old and widespread theme in premodern Arabic literature of various genres.

11. The concept of *fitna* has been made central to the discussions of sexuality and the role of women in Muslim societies in the work of the feminist author Fatima Mernissi, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (London, 1984). For one challenge to this approach, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments* (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 144–45. For a thought-provoking discussion of *fitna* and sexual hierarchy, see Paula Sanders, "Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries of Sex and Gender,* ed. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, 1991), pp. 74–95.

12. The entry for the root *ḥ*r*m* and its possible derivations in the 1968 Beirut edition of the *Lisān al-ʿarab* covers eleven folio pages, which is far longer than Ibn Manẓūr's usual entries. Most of the variations of this root listed by Ibn Manẓūr have nothing to do with women.

13. According to the medieval Arabic lexicographers, "the *ḥarīm* of a house is what is contained within it once its door has been shut." A man's *ḥarīm* was "that which he fights for and protects" or "his dependents (*ʿiyāl*) and women and that which he protects [*wa ḥuram al-rajul wa ḥarīmuhu mā yuqātilu ʿanhu wa yaḥmīhu wa ḥuram al-rajul ʿiyāluhu wa nisāʾuhu wa mā yaḥmī*]." See *Lisān al-ʿarab,* s.v. "*ḥ*r*m*." The word *ḥuram* is the plural of *ḥarīm*. *Ḥarīm,* when used for persons in Mamluk narrative texts, is almost invariably used as a collective noun which signifies "women." But the synonymous usage in the same texts of words such as *ahl* (which means "people" or "family" but was also a polite way of referring to "women of the family") and *ʿiyāl* (which can be translated as "dependents," including free women, children, and slaves) reveals the complex matrix of family and spatial relations which the term *ḥarīm* represented. Mamluk endowment deeds describe in detail houses as well as apartment buildings of various kinds among the revenue-generating property of the endowments. These deeds do single out some rooms by function, but they do not specify any one area of the household as reserved for women. The term *qāʿa ḥurmīya,* which appears in some documents, seems to refer to the largest, most elaborate, and most private *qāʿa* (grand hall) in a wealthy residence. In the course of my own research, I have not encountered architectural terminology that specifies a spatial distinction based on gender like the Ottoman terms *haremlik* and *selamlik*. This is borne out by the work of architectural historians.

See Zakarya, *Deux palais,* p. 105, n. 30. Goitein cites the occurrence of the term *qāʿa ḥurmīya* in three Geniza documents—two from twelfth-century Alexandria and one from fourteenth-century Fustat; see *Mediterranean Society,* vol. 1, *Economic Foundations,* p. 71; and vol. 4, *Daily Life,* pp. 63–64; p. 365, nn. 92–93. Goitein assumes that this term means "women's quarters," but the excerpt he gives from the document dated 1194 indicates only that the *qāʿa* so designated is large (*kabīra*). Amīn and Ibrāhīm, *Architectural Terms,* define the term *qāʿa ḥarmīya* (*sic*) as "the *qāʿa* for the *ḥarīm,*" that is, "the grand chamber, hall for the *harīm,* i.e., the women," but cite no literary or archival documentation for this definition.

14. On the term *darkāh,* see note 4 and Amīn and Ibrāhīm, *Architectural Terms,* p. 47. Mona Zakarya also gives a technical description of *darkāh* as "the space immediately following the monumental entryway of a mansion or a mosque on the ground floor" and *dihlīz* as a "space of passage and of interchange between a principal element and a secondary element [in the architectural structure]," in her study of both the documents and the physical remains of two Mamluk residences, one civilian and one military; see Zakarya, *Deux palais,* pp. 119, 121.

15. For further discussion of the *muqaddam,* see note 30.

16. ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Ḥusayn al-Shādhilī, *Bahjat al-ʿābidīn bi-tarjamat jalāl al-dīn,* Ms. Chester Beatty 4436, fols. 46v–47r. This particular anecdote is from a section on the posthumous miracles of al-Suyūṭī and is clearly intended to be a classic statement about the triumph of *dīn* (piety) over *dunya* (worldliness). The grateful West African pilgrims, having received religious instruction from the shaykh during their stay in Cairo, present al-Suyūṭī with a eunuch slave, an expensive and prestigious gift. Like a good Muslim master, the shaykh arranges for the manumission and future of his slaves prior to his own death. But to show his disdain for the sultan's court (or, more accurately, for those colleagues of his who were preferred over him by those in power), al-Suyūṭī refuses to allow his eunuch to follow a suitable career in the Citadel, even though the *muqaddam al-mamālīk* offers to be the eunuch's patron. Instead, he sets the eunuch up as a lowly bean seller, an act the other eunuchs see clearly as an intended insult to their kind (*jins*). After al-Suyūṭī's death, the *muqaddam* persuades the shaykh's mother, the executor of his estate, to permit the eunuch to take up a more appropriate occupation in the eunuch corps of the Citadel. It is not surprising, in the context of this particular hagiography, that the eunuch abuses his newly acquired status and is punished by his old master, who returns from the grave in a state of righteous anger. I am grateful to Elizabeth Sartain for bringing this anecdote to my attention and for kindly allowing me access to her photocopies of the manuscripts of al-Shādhilī's biography of al-Suyūṭī. On al-Shādhilī, see Elizabeth Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background* (Cambridge, 1975), 1:146–47.

17. More often than not, confiscation was simply a kind of enforced extralegal taxation, carried out without physical violence. See ʿAlī ibn Da'ūd ibn al-Khaṭīb al-Jawharī al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-haṣr bi-abnāʾ al-ʿaṣr,* ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), pp. 377–78, for a fairly typical description of such a confiscation, beginning: "On Friday, the seventh of the month [of Rajab of the year 876/1471], the sultan, may God support him, ordered some of the eunuchs to go to the house of the lord Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Kātib Jakam, the father of the judge Kamāl al-Dīn the Inspector of the Army and to bring an accounting of the finances of his father who was [at that time] connected with the march of Alexandria." In this case, the "confiscation" of this prominent and powerful family of Coptic converts (a family that married its daughters to Mamluk amirs, some of whom were their own freedmen) turned into a donation, of which 5,000 dinars were returned by the sultan to the grandmother of the family as a sign of respect. Such amicable settlements did not occur, however, when the object was both to extract money and to remove someone permanently from government office. In such cases the eunuchs directed and supervised the imprisonment and often the torture of the confiscatees. See Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn al-Furat (735/1334–807/1405), *Taʾrīkh al-duwal waʾl-mulūk,* ed. Constantine Zurayk and Najla ʿIzz al-Dīn (Beirut, 1938), 9:429ff., for a detailed description of one such confiscation, directed against the household of the *ustadār,* or royal majordomo, Jamāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ẓāhirī, and supervised by the eunuchs Fāris al-Dīn Shāhīn al-Ḥasanī, the *jamdār,* or royal Master of the Robe, and Ṣandal al-Manjākī, the sultan's *khāzindār,* or chief treasurer. The *ustadār,* his family members (including his two wives), and his associates were imprisoned in Ṣandal's home off and on, and more than one adult male from the fallen house of Jamāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd was tortured. Since the confiscated goods were destined for the sultan's treasury, the involvement of the eunuch chief treasurer was quite practical. It should be emphasized, however, that it was Ṣandal's eunuchness as much as his official position that gave him a role in this process.

18. On Ibn Taymiyya (661/1256–728/1328), see the classic work of Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-Din Ahmad b. Taimiya* (Cairo, 1939), as well as the same author's essay "Ibn Taymiyya," in *EI* (2). See also Donald Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 4 (1973): 311–27, and "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?," *Studia Islamica* 41 (1975): 93–111.

19. "*Ẓuhūr al-nisāʾ sabab al-fitna waʾl-rijāl qawwāmūn alayhinna.*" Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥijāb al-marʾa wa-libāsuhā fīʾl-ṣalāt,* 2d ed., ed. Muḥammad al-Albānī, rev. with foreword by Muḥammad al-Albānī (Damascus, A.H. 1393), p. 32. There are several editions available of this epistle. The actual title is simply *al-Libās fīʾl-ṣalāt* (The [Proper] Clothing for Prayer), but it has also been

published more than once under the title used by al-Albānī (Veiling of the Female and Her [Appropriate] Dress While Praying).

20. On the dangers posed by the public appearance of adolescent boys, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥijāb al-marʾa wa libāsuhā fiʾl-ṣalāt,* pp. 36–37, 41–43. See also, in the work of his near contemporary Idrīs ibn Baydakīn, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fiʾl-hawādith waʾl-bidaʿ*, ed. Subhi Labib, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1986), 1:215. Fear of the moral danger posed by the beautiful boy was already a topos in the third/ninth-century collections of *ḥadīth.* See James A. Bellamy, "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam,* ed. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot (Malibu, Calif., 1979), pp. 37–40. On the ambiguous position of the adolescent boy in medieval Arabic erotic literature, see Everett K. Rowson's provocative essay "The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists," in *Body Guards,* ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York, 1991), pp. 50–79.

21. The Qurʾan, *sura* 24:60, excuses *qawāʿid* (women past childbearing) "who are no longer desired for marriage" from some of the strictures of modest dress imposed on younger women. Mamluk jurists interpreted this verse to mean that older women were not required to veil. But the persistent topos in Mamluk writings of all genres of the unveiled, mobile old woman who serves as "an agent of debauchery" (al-Subkī, *Muʿīd,* p. 56) demonstrates that *fitna* was not located simply in the sexually active young woman. The saying that "women are lacking in reason and religion" comes from an oft-quoted prophetic tradition which, according to Wensinck, is found only in the collection of Ibn Ḥanbal. For the variant versions, see A. J. Wensinck et. al., eds., *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane,* 8 vols. (Leiden, 1933–88), 4:302, ll. 24–26.

22. *Sūrat al-nisāʾ*, 4:34, "Men are set over women because of God's making some of them [men] to excel over others [women]."

23. Ibn al-Ḥājj al-ʿAbdarī, (737–ca. 817/1336–ca. 1416), *Madkhal al-sharʿ al-sharīf,* 4 vols. (Cairo, 1380/1960), 1:203–4. Ibn al-Ḥājj is also invoking a well-known tradition of the Prophet, "The man is a shepherd over his family and he is responsible for his flock." See Wensinck, *Concordance,* 2:273. The word *raʿīya,* "flock," "those who must be protected," is also used to describe the relationship between the ruler and his subjects.

24. Abuʾ l Maḥāsin Yūsuf ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī akhbār miṣr waʾl-qāhira,* 16 vols. (Cairo, 1929–72), 13:111–12. The eunuch's "master," Sultan Faraj, was in fact dead, having been murdered by his own mamluks. The *zimāmdār* Kāfūr, who held the keys to the Citadel gate, took on the role of mediator between factions and facilitated the transfer of power. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, despite Faraj's seizure of his and his brother's patrimony, wrote in retrospect that Kāfūr was "more of a man" *(arjal)* than Arghūn, the commander of the royal stables, for the latter "despite the great numbers of mamluks of the

sultan and his own mamluks," had abandoned his post at the gate of the Citadel, where he was supposed to be holding a defensive position against the leaders of the coup (p. 237).

25. "*Wa kāna Kāfūr yaqṣidu bithalika al-taṭwīl* [Kāfūr's intention in this was to delay]," 13:112.

26. Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, p. 30. On Ibn Shāhīn, see Jean Gaulmier and Toufic Fahd, *EI* (2), s.v. "Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī." On the status of Jerusalem as the third sanctuary of the Dār al-Islām, see S. D. Goitein, *EI* (2), s.v. "al-Kuds." Goitein points out that *ḥadīth* (traditions) supporting Jerusalem's status as the third *ḥaram* exist from the first century of Islam. Under the Mamluks, however, this status became a matter of state policy with the creation of the office of *nāẓir al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn* for the supervision of Jerusalem and Hebron. Goitein also points out that at least thirty treatises on *faḍā'il al-quds* (the virtues of Jerusalem) exist from the Mamluk period. Hebron, unlike Jerusalem, which centers around the Dome of the Rock, is a multitomb sanctuary which includes the sepulchre of the Prophet Abraham, of the Patriarchs and their wives, and, according to popular belief, of the Prophet Joseph. On the importance of Hebron as a *ḥaram* under the Mamluks, see Moshe Sharon's well-documented survey of the history of the city in *EI* (2), s.v. "al-Khalīl." See also Emmanuel Sivan, "Le Caractère de Jérusalem dans l'Islam aux XIIe–XIIIe siècles," *Studia Islamica* 28 (1967): 149–82; "The Beginning of the *Faḍā'il al-Quds* Literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 263–71; and M. J. Kister, "You Shall Only Set out for Three Mosques: A Study of an Egyptian Tradition," *Le Museon* 82 (1969): 173–96.

27. Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349), *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (Paris, 1985), pp. 80–84. See also Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1452), *Kitāb al-mawāʿiẓ wa'l-iʿtibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭāṭ wa'l-athār*, 2 vols. (Bulaq, A.H. 1270), 2:204–05. In subsequent references this work by al-Maqrīzī will be cited as *Khiṭāṭ*.

28. In his discussion of the divisions of the eunuch corps of the Citadel, Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī (p. 122) refers to the *qism ʿala al-abwāb*, "the division for the gates/doors."

29. On the sultan's private quarters in the Citadel, the elaborate complex known as al-Ādur al-Sharīfa, see Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, pp. 121–23; al-ʿUmarī, p. 82. On the office of *zimāmdār*, see Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿāt al-inshā'*, 14 vols. (Cairo, 1913–20), 5:459; al-Subkī, *Muʿīd*, p. 56.

30. Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī described the barracks-school complex of the Cairo Citadel as consisting of twelve barracks "and every barrack among them is the size of a city quarter (*ḥāra*) containing a number of dwellings so that it is possible for a thousand mamluks to live in each barrack" (p. 27). On the role of the *muqaddam al-mamālīk*, see *Khiṭāṭ*, 2:213–214; Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī,

pp. 121–22; al-Qalqashandī, 12:174. The merchant Emmanuel Piloti (writing ca. 1420) emphasized the importance of "les gran maistres, que sont tavassi, qu'est autant a dire con chastres [the grand masters who are *tavassi,* that is to say, they are castrated]," in the training and islamisization of the "little slaves." See his *Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti sur le passage en Terre Sainte (1420)*, ed. Pierre-Herman Dopp (Louvain, 1958), pp. 54–55. Al-Maqrīzī's description of the Citadel barracks-school is an important source for David Ayalon's discussion of the *muqaddam al-mamālīk;* see his essay "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," p. 269, n. 2; and "L'ésclavage de Mamelouk," *Oriental Notes and Studies,* no. 1 (1951): 14–15, 49–50, n. 119. Ulrich Haarmann's completion of the scholarly edition begun by Subhi Labib of the treatise on the "Blessings of the Turks" by Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsī (d. 888/1483), who, unlike al-Maqrīzī, actually worked within the barracks-school as a teacher, provides an important new source on the education of the mamluk cadets and the role of the eunuchs in that process. I am grateful to Ulrich Haarmann for kindly bringing this work to my attention and making it accessible to me prior to its publication. See *Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsīs Traktat über die Segnungen, die die Turken dem Lände Ägypten beschert haben,* ed. Subhi Labib and Ulrich Haarmann (Stuttgart, 1994).

31. The list of the qualities of the royal eunuchs is taken from a Mamluk handbook on government by al-Muḥsin ibn ʿAbd Allah al-ʿAbbāsī (d. 710/1310), *Athār al-uwal fī tartīb al-duwal* (Beirut, 1409/1989), p. 234. See al-Subkī, *Muʿīd,* p. 122, on the *muqaddam* as the guardian of sexual boundaries for adolescent boys. Another position of trust, although of a different nature, the office of the sultan's chief treasurer, *al-khāzindār al-kabīr,* was often held by a prominent eunuch. On this office, see David Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," p. 271. On the education of the sultan's sons in the barracks, see the discussion of the term *faqīh al-asyād* (the teacher/jurisprudent of the sayyids) by Ulrich Haarmann in his introduction to *Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsis Traktat,* pp. 2, 15. In the Ottoman royal household, as in that of the Mamluks, the Sultan's slaves and kin were also divided into two parallel "families" under eunuch supervision. Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem, Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 1993), and Gülrü Necipoglu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), provide insightful and innovative studies of the royal household in the Ottoman context.

32. See Ibn al-Khāṭib al-Jawhārī, pp. 261–62, 497. See also Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," p. 272, n. 6.

33. "In questa cità è uno castello fortissimo e grando, in lo qual habita el Soldano *cum* tuta la sua corte e guardia ch'è più de dodecemillia Mamaluchi. Questo castello ha quatordece porte de fero, per le quale se passa, volendo andare alla sua persona et alla audientia. Alle qual porte stano le continue

guardie: et al l'ultima, per più fidelità et honore, stano li Eunuchi, cum tanto fausto e reputatione che da tuti sono reveriti, *etiam* da Signori et Armiragli de mille lance." Francesco Suriano, *Il trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente di Frate Francesco Suriano*, ed. Girolamo Golubovich (Milan, 1900), pp. 178–79; in English, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, trans. Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Hoade, with notes and introduction by Bellarmino Bagatti (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 190. Suriano (1450–after 1529), a client of the powerful amir Yashbak al-Faqīh ("our protector and intercessor"), belongs, with Piloti, to the small but very important category of European observers of Mamluk society who were fluent in spoken Arabic and were semipermanent residents of the Mamluk domain. See Bagatti's notes on Suriano, in *Treatise*, pp. 1–17. The passage cited is Bellorini and Hoade's translation. For an insightful discussion of the ceremonial role of eunuchs in the Fatimid court, see Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and The City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994), pp. 35–36.

34. R. B. Serjeant, "*Ḥaram* and *Ḥawṭa:* The Sacred Enclave in Arabia," in *Mélanges Taha Husayn* (Cairo, 1962), pp. 14–58; rpt. in *Studies in Arabian History and Civilization* (London, 1981). See also, J. Chelhod, *EI* (2), s.v. "*Ḥawṭa.*"

35. Doris Behrens-AbouSeif, in a different context, compares the domed structure in which the early Mamluk sultans held audience to earlier Fatimid shrines. See Doris Behrens-AbouSeif, "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial," *Annales Islamologiques* 24 (1988): pp. 4–79.

36. Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, p. 30.

37. Unlike the society of Madina, the eunuch societies of the other three *ḥarams* do not figure prominently in the late medieval sources. Descriptions of the society of Mecca (which, although always inferior to that of Madina, did achieve a prominent position in the Ottoman period) do not appear until the eighteenth century. Some such society did exist under the Mamluks, although on a small scale, since the document of *waqf* of the eunuch Shāhīn al-Ḥasanī, dated 18 Muḥarram 808/July 15, 1405, includes provisions for the eunuchs of Mecca in the service of the *maqām Ibrāhīm.* This same document also includes provisions for the eunuchs at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem as well as very explicit and much more extensive provisions for the society of Madina. It also appears to contain provisions for eunuchs at Hebron (al-Khalīl). These eunuchs are described as being in the service of the *maqām Ibrāhīm,* the "station of Abraham," a small domed area to the northeast side of the Kaʿba on the oval pavement which surrounds the great shrine and on which the believers perform their circumambulation. The focus of the *maqām* is a rock containing the impression of a footprint said to be that of the prophet Abraham, who, in Muslim tradition, competes with Adam as the builder of the Kaʿba. For a concise description of the *maqām Ibrāhīm,* see Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals* (New York, 1988), pp. 18–19, 24–25.

I remain uncertain, however, of my reading of this latter section of Shāhīn's document concerning Hebron. Since I was unable to obtain a photocopy of the document, I am presenting it with a caveat as tentative evidence on Hebron until I have the opportunity to return to the archives in Cairo. The existence of the society under the Mamluks is, however, substantiated by a sixteenth-century Ottoman document translated by Uriel Heyd and cited by Moshe Sharon in his *EI* (2) essay s.v. "al-Khalīl." This document, dated 28 Safar 991/March 23, 1583, sixty-four years after the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Empire, is a *firmān* issued by Sultan Murad II to the *defterdar* of Damascus in response to a petition from the administrator of the *awqāf* (endowments) of the *ḥaram* of Hebron. The latter has complained that the practice "since olden times" of appointing eunuchs (*tavasi*) as guardians of the Prophet Abraham's sepulchre in Hebron has been violated by unidentified qadis who, "coveting the money of the people from outside, have [now] given these positions to strangers [*ecnebi*]." The sultan orders that the offices be given to eunuchs "as has been customary since olden times." *Ottoman Documents on Palestine,* trans. Uriel Heyd (Oxford, 1960), pp. 157–58. The twice-repeated phrase "since olden times" certainly refers to the previous dynasty, that of the "Circassians," as the Ottomans termed the Mamluk sultans. Amnon Cohen and Bernard Lewis, in *Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 15–16, comment on the use of the word *hadim* for mosque functionaries in the population registers for Ottoman Palestine. While some of these *hadims* may be "servants" rather than eunuchs, those described in a *sijill* of 1003/1594–95, "the *sada,* the *hadims* of the Masjid al-Aqsa," are not, as Cohen argues, necessarily *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet), since *sāda* (lords) was a common term of respect for eunuchs at the sanctuary of Madina. Although I agree with Charles Pellat, *EI* (2), s.v. "*khaṣī*," that it would be "rash" to translate a tenth-century reference to *khuddām* at the Dome of the Rock as "eunuchs," the use of eunuchs at Jerusalem and Hebron may go back to the early Ayyubids, as appears to be the case in Madina. F. E. Peters, in *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York, 1986), p. 164, maintains incorrectly that the eunuchs (*ṭawāshiya*) of Mecca appeared in the Ottoman period as replacements for "temple slaves," whose use went back to ancient Jewish Jerusalem. He also maintains that the sweeping done by the eunuchs of the Kaʿba was "some vaguely reflected reflex of the past" when the "temple slaves" were menials. This interpretation misses the ritual aspect of this sweeping, which was, in this context, by no means a menial task.

38. *Khiṭāṭ,* 2:382.

39. The literal translation of Bayn al-Qaṣrayn is "between the two palaces," and referred in Fatimid times to the ceremonial ground between the eastern and western Fatimid palaces. Al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Illāh Street in modern Cairo, where the Nāṣiriyya, the tomb of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ, and the great complex of Qalāwūn

still stand, more or less corresponds to this old royal way. Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, the last effective Ayyubid ruler of Egypt, had been the master and manumitter of three of the early Mamluk sultans: Aybak, Baybars, and Qalāwūn. These men had all been involved to varying degrees in the coup after al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ's death which led to the assassination of their old master's son Tūrānshāh, and to the demise of the Ayyubid dynasty. The early Mamluk sultans, however, maintained a symbolic genealogy of loyalty by using the tomb of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ (who, unlike his son, was always presented in Mamluk texts as an ideal ruler) as a ceremonial site. Until the accession of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's own son Abū Bakr, any royal mamluk who was appointed to the rank of amir (officer) gave his personal oath of loyalty to the reigning sultan at the *madrasa*-tomb of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ. Given the ceremonial importance of this location, it is not surprising that Baybars I chose to build his own *madrasa* next to the tomb of his former master. His eventual successor and onetime fellow slave Qalāwūn built his great hospital-*madrasa*-tomb complex across from it. Abū Bakr, Qalāwūn's grandson, attempted to change the ceremonial script when he moved the site of the oath of allegiance to the tomb of his grandfather. See *Khiṭāṭ*, 2:380. The importance of the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn in its Mamluk context has been discussed by Christine Kessler, "Funerary Architecture Within the City," *Colloque internationale sur l'histoire du Caire* (Gräfenhainichen, 1969), pp. 257–67; and by Leonor Fernandes, "The Foundation of Baybars al-Jashnakir: Its Waqf, History, and Architecture," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 21–42.

40. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ*, 2:382.

41. "*Wa adraktu hadhihi 'l-madrasa wa-hiya muḥtarama ilā al-ghāya yajlis bi-dihlīzihā ʿidda min al-ṭawāshiya wa-la yumkin gharīb an yasʿad ilayhā.*" *Khiṭāṭ*, 2:382. In an extensive footnote to his article "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," pp. 269–71, n. 3, David Ayalon draws attention to this passage in the *Khiṭāṭ* and calls for further research on the subject. Although Ayalon postulated—on the basis of the material in the *Khiṭāṭ*—that the appointment of eunuch guardians may have been a Qalāwūnid phenomenon, additional evidence, especially that contained in Mamluk documents preserved in the Cairo archives, indicates that the institution was much more widespread than al-Maqrīzī's descriptions indicate. It is clear that the Qalāwūnid sultans were very intent on creating a symbolic Prophet-sultan axis between Madina and Cairo, but they did not initiate the use of eunuch guardians in tombs, and the practice continued long after the fall of the Qalāwūnid family.

42. For an architectural plan of the Nāṣiriyya, see K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1952–59), 2:234–239, fig. 31. Al-Nāṣir himself was buried not in his tomb complex but with his father in the adjacent complex of Qalāwūn.

43. Al-Maqrīzī gives a detailed visual description of this courtyard preceding

the tomb chamber and of its eunuch guardians in his own time (*Khiṭaṭ*, 2:380–81). A century earlier Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī (d. 732/1331–32), in his encyclopedia for Chancery scribes, listed the endowed positions at the Qalāwūn complex. He mentioned six eunuchs who were appointed at the tomb with a monthly salary of fifty dirhams each. Their job, he says, was "to guard [the tomb's] coffers and to prevent anyone who might attempt to enter it at any time other than the times of prayer." Al-Nuwayrī, who held various high positions in the civilian bureaucracy during the reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, at one time served as overseer of the funds of the Qalāwūn complex. See *Nihāyat al-ʿarab fī funūn al-adab*, vol. 31 (Cairo, 1991), p. 111. In his discussion of the opening of the Qalāwūn complex in the entry for the year 683/1285, Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibn al-Furāt (735/1334–807/1405) copied al-Nuwayrī's text almost verbatim. See *Ta'rīkh al-duwal wa'l-mulūk*, ed. Costi Zurayk and Nejla Izzedin (Beirut, 1939), 8:10. For a scholarly discussion of the layers of sources in these Mamluk texts, see Donald Little's valuable study *An Introduction to Mamluk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Annalistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalā'un* (Wiesbaden, 1970). The buildings of the Qalāwūn complex, and especially the tomb chamber, have been the subject of a number of studies by historians of Islamic art and architecture. See K. A. C. Creswell, "The Maristan, Mausoleum, and Madrasa of Sultan Qalā'ūn," in *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:190–212. Michael Meinecke, "Das Mausoleum des Qualā'ūn in Kairo: Untersuchungen zur Genese der mamlukischen Architekturdekoration," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 27 (1971): 47–80, figs. 1–12.

44. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 51, 12 Dhū al-ḥijja 789 (December 24, 1387). The translation is my own from the original document. See also the study of the Barqūq complex by Saleh Lamei Mostafa with an edition of the document and a German translation by Felicitas Jaritz, in Saleh Lamei Mostafa, *Madrasa, Hanqah und Mausoleum des Barqūq in Kairo* (Glückstadt, 1982).

45. For the text of Faraj's endowment deed for his great complex in the northern cemetery, see Ulrich Haarmann, "Mamluk Endowment Deeds as a Source for the History of Education in Late Medieval Egypt," *al-Abḥāth* 28 (1980): 31–47. For an architectural discussion of the complex, see Saleh Lamei Mustafa, *Kloster und Mausoleum des Faraǧ ibn Barqūq in Kairo* (Glückstadt, 1968).

46. Awqāf, no. 938q (1909 hand copy). I am grateful to Hazem Sayed for kindly bringing this passage in the endowment deed of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh to my attention and for providing me with copies of the relevant pages from the 1909 hand copy of the document preserved in the Ministry of Awqāf. The actual tomb complex of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, as it stands today, has only one tomb chamber.

47. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 62, 18 Muḥarram 808 (July 16, 1405). Shāhīn al-Ḥasanī was one of the leading royal eunuchs under Sultan Faraj. He appears as both the chief of the Masters of the Robe and as the *lālā* (tutor) of Sultan Faraj and of the latter's brother, al-Malik al-Manṣūr ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. See Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm,* 13:42–43. Al-Sakhāwī (*al-Ḍaw' al-lāmiʿ*, 3:393, no. 1124) gives 815/1412 as Shāhīn's date of death and says that he led the *hajj* and also held the post of supervisor of the Baybarsiyya complex.

48. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 110, 14 Shawwāl 864 (August 2, 1460). See al-Sakhāwī (*al-Ḍaw' al-lāmiʿ*, 10:233–234, no. 983) for the biography of Zayn al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 874/1469). Zayn al-Dīn Yaḥyā's preference for his white slaves appears more than once in this endowment deed. In Mamluk Egypt perceived color was more important than the fluid categories of ethnicity. A slave of African origin might be defined as "black" or "brown" according to an ethnic/geographic designation such as *Ḥabashī* (Ethiopian or East African). He was *mamlūk* in the sense of "owned one" but could never be a *Turkī* or "turk," i.e., a military man or *mamlūk* in the sense of "armed slave." It was the latter meaning that led the monk Felix Faber to translate *mamlūk* simply as "armed man," ("Mamaluci id est armati," *Evagatorium,* 3:92). A Circassian, a Greek, even a captured German—almost any male slave defined as white (*abyaḍ*)—could, with the proper patronage, acquire Turkish ethnicity, join the *armati,* and on some level participate in the world of the political elite. The eunuchs were in fact the only group of slaves in Mamluk Egypt whose careers were not determined by categories of color and who seemed, by virtue of being eunuchs, to transcend this boundary. In this respect Zayn al-Dīn Yaḥyā's division of his eunuchs according to the categories "black" and "white" is unusual.

49. The endowment deed for the amir Ṣarghitmish provides for two tomb guardians (*khādimayn zimāmayn*) who are to be perpetually resident in two separate apartments, one of them located off the southern *īwān* or vaulted chamber and the other off the northern *īwān* of the cruciform college. But the tomb chamber in which Ṣarghitmish planned to be buried has no point of access from outside the college. One still enters the tomb area, as Ṣarghitmish's contemporaries did, from the main courtyard of the college, through a door in the northern *īwān.* Ṣarghitmish's placement of the apartment for his guardians had been carefully planned; one apartment would be right next to the actual tomb entrance, the other directly across from it. See ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Ibrāhīm, *Nuṣṣān jadīdān min wāthīqat al-amīr Ṣarghitmish* (Cairo, 1971), pp. 22–23. The Ṣarghitmish complex, completed in 757/1356, still stands on Ṣalība Street in modern Cairo. Because the author of this deed does not use the explicit terms for "eunuchs" but refers to the tomb guardians by the euphemistic words *khādim* (servant) and *zimām* (supervisor), I have not included the Ṣarghitmish complex in my analysis. I believe, however, that these two figures were meant to be eunuchs. In the contemporaneous deed of Sultan Ḥasan, the word *khādim* is also

used by itself (without the addition, for example, of a word such as *khaṣī,* "castrated") but it is very clear from the other evidence in the document that the tomb guardians of Sultan Ḥasan's complex are eunuchs. David Ayalon (see "The Eunuchs in Islam," pp. 84ff.) has marshaled abundant evidence for the use of the word *khādim* alone to signify "eunuch." I have been cautious, however, in my interpretation of *khādim.*

50. L. A. Mayer, ed., *The Buildings of Qaytbay as Described in His Endowment Deed* (London, 1938), p. 70.

51. Awqāf, no. 881, published by Muḥammad Amīn as an appendix to his edition of Ibn Habīb (d. 889/1387), *Tadhkirat al-nabīh fī ayyām al-manṣūr wa banīh,* 3 vols. (Cairo, 1976–86), 3:406–7.

52. The title of the eunuch guardian of the women of a household, *zimāmdār,* was frequently shortened to *zimām.* Al-Qalqashandī, in his fifteenth-century handbook for scribes of the royal Chancery (*Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā,* 5:459), maintained that the etymology of the word was Persian, from *zanān* (women) and *dār* (owner). But the masses, al-Qalqashandī maintained, incorrectly derived the word from the Arabic *zimām* ("reins," used metaphorically in the sense of government) and *dār* (house). Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes,* s.v. "*zimām,*" argues that it was in fact the masses, not the learned al-Qalqashandī, who were correct and that *zimām* in the sense of "supervisor" or "commander" had a classical Arabic foundation. Whatever the origin of the term, when a tomb guardian was described as *zimām al-qubba* (*zimām* of the tomb), a common expression in the endowment deeds, and was also a eunuch, the association with the eunuch *zimām* of the household was possible.

53. *Khiṭāṭ,* 2:380.

54. Peter Brown refers to the "joining of Heaven and Earth" at the graves of Christian saints in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), p. 4.

55. Despite the tendency of some modern scholars to relegate the practice of *ziyārāt al-qubūr* (the visiting of tombs) to "popular" or even "heterodox" Islam, Ignaz Goldziher, in his seminal essay "Veneration of Saints in Islam," in *Muslim Studies,* vol. 2, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. S. M. Stern and C. R. Barber (London, 1971), pp. 295–344, comments: "Nothing could illustrate the power of the *ijmāʿ* [consensus] within Islamic religion so clearly as the veneration of saints" (p. 332). Despite the anti-tomb faction (whose greatest spokesperson was undoubtedly Ibn Taymiyya), most religious scholars in the Mamluk Empire visited tombs and asked for the intercession (*shafāʿa*) of the Prophet and of lesser holy men and women. For a detailed study of the Mamluk practice of *ziyārāt al-qubūr,* see Christopher Taylor's Ph.D. dissertation, "The Cult of the Saints in Mamluk Egypt" (Princeton University, 1989). For a discussion of the cult of the saints within the broader context of Mamluk popular culture, see Barbara Längner's important study, *Untersuchungen zur historischen Volks-*

kunde Aegyptens nach Mamlukischen Quellen (Berlin, 1983). On the cult of the saints in medieval Cairo, see also Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 15–22, 67–78.

56. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ*, 2:364.

57. Ibn al-Ḥājj quotes this and similar prophetic traditions which either completely forbid the construction of any structure over the grave or else strictly limit the kind of construction that is permissible. In contrast, the attitude of Ibn al-Zayyāt, the fourteenth-century author of a guidebook to the great cemetery of Cairo, the Qarāfa, reflected what was, at the time, mainstream Sunni Islam and the dominant attitude of religious scholars. He simply ignored or reinterpreted the anti-tomb tradition and presented a selection of *ḥadīth*s in support of the visiting of tombs. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 814/1411), *al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fī tartīb al-ziyāra* (Bulaq ed.; rpt. Baghdad, n.d.), pp. 14–18 and passim.

58. On the fourteenth day of Shaʿbān as an important Mamluk festival, see Längner, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 42–45.

59. Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1:282.

60. Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allah ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla: Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah,* ed. and trans. C. Defremery and B. R. Sanguinetti, 4 vols. (Paris, 1825), 1:74.

61. Piloti, *Traité,* p. 88.

62. Thenaud, *Le Voyage d'Outremer,* p. 50. Suriano had also noted the practice of placing sweet basil on the tombs (*Treatise on the Holy Land,* p. 192).

63. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tadhkirat al-nabīh fī ayyām al-manṣūr wa banīh,* 3:407.

64. The title *khawand,* from the Persian *khudawand* (lord), was commonly used in the Mamluk period to designate royal women, specifically the daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives of sultans. See Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raziq, *La Femme au temps des mamlouks en Egypte* (Cairo, 1973), pp. 13–14. According to Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, the title could not be used by the sultan's concubines, only by his legal wives (p. 121).

65. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ,* 2:382–383; cf. Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," pp. 269–71, n. 3.

66. On the *sarāwīl* or *sirwāl,* see Yedida Stillman and Norman Stillman, *EI* (2), s.v. "Libās," p. 733.

67. The *rajul ajnabī* is a man who is not *maḥram,* that is, not within the degree of consanguinity that prohibits sexual intercourse.

68. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 51, 12 Dhū al-ḥijja 789 (December 24, 1387); cf. Felicitas Jaritz's edition and translation, *Madrasa, Hanqah und Mausoleum des Barqūq in Kairo,* pp. 133, 159.

69. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 62, 18 Muḥarram 808 (August 2, 1460), verso.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1:261–64.

72. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 110, 14 Shawwāl 864 (August 2, 1460), verso.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1:416. Whether the eunuchs at ʿAlī's tomb were placed there in imitation of the society of Madina or whether they appear independently is a question that requires further research, especially in Shiʿi sources.

75. On the poetry of longing for the Prophet and his sanctuary, see Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 176–215. For a more specific discussion of the early Mamluk poets such as al-Būṣīrī and Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd, see ʿAlī Ṣāfī Ḥusayn, *Al-adab al-ṣufī fī miṣr fī 'l-qarn al-sābiʿ al-hijrī* (Cairo, 1964). See also Shoshan, *Popular Culture.*

76. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb iqtiḍā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhalafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm,* (Cairo, 1950), p. 382; cf. Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimiya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* (Mouton, 1976), pp. 288–89.

77. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ,* 2:380; cf. Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," pp. 269–71, n. 3.

78. Stephen Humphreys discusses the tomb-*qibla* correspondence in the Sultan Ḥasan complex and the architectural parallels between the Dome of the Rock and the tomb of Qalāwūn in his thought-provoking article "The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay," *Studia Islamica* 35 (1972): 69–119. For a different perspective on the architecture of the Qalāwūn mausoleum, see Meinecke, "Das Mausoleum des Qualā'ūn in Kairo."

79. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa al-laṭīfa bi-akhbār al-balad al-sharīfa,* ed. Asʿad Ṭarābazūnī al-Ḥusaynī, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1399/1979), 1:61–63. The same editor prepared a previous edition of *al-Tuḥfa al-laṭīfa,* 3 vols. (Cairo, 1376–77/1957–58) 1:48–50. Although both editions are supposedly based on the same manuscripts, they give variant readings. The 1957–58 edition, which goes up to the letter ʿ*ayn,* is not as complete as the 1979 edition, which goes up to the letter *kāf.* Both editions are inaccurate and should be corrected against the Istanbul ms., Topkapı Sarayı, Medine 527. In subsequent references the editions will be cited as *al-Tuḥfa* (1979) and *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58). The manuscript will be cited as *al-Tuḥfa* (Topkapı). Nikita Elisséeff mentions the founding of the eunuch society by Nūr al-Dīn in *Nur ad-Din: un grand prince musulman de Syrie au temps des Croisades (511–569/1118–1174),* 3 vols. (Damascus, 1967), 2:559. His source, however, is not a contemporary biography of Nūr al-Dīn but the late nineteenth-century account by Ibrāhim Rifʿat Pasha, *Mir'at al-ḥaramayn,* 2 vols. (Cairo, 1344/1925), 1:459. Ibrāhim Rifʿat Pasha actually gives both the Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn versions and seems to have drawn his information from the same eighteenth-century sources used by Jaʿfar ibn Ismāʿīl al-Barzanjī in his work completed in 1854, *Nuzhat al-nāẓirīn fī masjid sayyid al-awwālīn wa'l-akhirīn,* 2d. ed. (Cairo, 1322/1914), pp. 90–91.

Ibn Shaddād does not mention the founding of the eunuch society by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in his *al-Sīra al-yūsufiyya* (Cairo, 1962), despite his enumeration of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's pious activities.

80. On the figures of Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in Mamluk mythology, see Längner, *Untersuchungen,* pp. 70–71, 86–89.

81. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Jubayr, *al-Riḥla,* ed. William Wright, 2d. ed., rev. by M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1907), p. 194; rpt. with translation by Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Les Voyages d'Ibn Jobair,* 4 vols. (Paris, 1949–65), 2:223. On the North African use of *fityān* (young men) as a euphemism for eunuchs, see Dozy, *Supplément,* s.v. "*fata*"; *EI* (2), s.v. "*fata.*" I have followed the usual practice of translating *ṣaqāliba* as "Slavs, Slavic." On the ambiguity of this term, see Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in Islam," pp. 92–124.

82. Ibn al-Najjār, *Kitāb al-durra al-thamīna fī akhbār al-madīna,* published as an appendix to the second volume of al-Fāsī's *Shifā' al-gharām bi-akhbār al-balad al-ḥarām,* vol. 2 (Mecca, 1957), 2:396. On Ibn al-Najjār, see C. E. Farah, "Ibn al-Najjār: A Neglected Arabic Historian," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 84 (1964): 226–27.

83. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:62; cf. *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:49.

84. Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1374/1955), 2:569–72. Owing to the complex history of this text, there are several different versions extant. After taking up residence in Madina, the Egyptian scholar al-Samhūdī composed a massive study of the city of the Prophet, titled *Iqtiḍā' al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā,* which he completed in 886/1481. Shortly afterwards, al-Samhūdī made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He left his autograph manuscript of the *Iqtiḍā'* in Madina in a storage area near the sanctuary along with his own multivolume personal library of earlier works on Madina. During his absence the second great fire of Madina destroyed the sanctuary and, with it, al-Samhūdī's magnum opus and his library. Fortunately he had taken with him to Mecca a shortened version of the *Iqtiḍā',* which he had composed at the request of a wealthy patron. He revised and updated this latter work, titled *Wafā' al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1374/1955), hereafter cited as *Wafā'*. This revised abridged work was completed in 901/1496. At some point before his death in 911/1506, al-Samhūdī composed an abridged version of this second work, titled *Khulāṣat al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā,* ed. Muḥammad Sulṭān al-Namakānī (Cairo, 1392/1972), hereafter cited as *Khulāṣat al-wafā'*. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld published a partial translation of the Munich codex of this work, *Geschichte der Stadt Madina* (Göttingen, 1860). Ḥāmid al-Jāsir has also published another treatise by al-Samhūdī titled *Khulāṣat al-wafā' bi-mā yajib li-ḥaḍrat al-muṣṭafā,* in *Rasā'il fī ta'rīkh al-madīna,* ed. Ḥāmid al-Jāsir (Riyad, 1392/1972), pp. 95–179, hereafter cited as al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir). This short treatise, Ḥāmid al-Jāsir

maintains, is not simply another abridgment of the *Iqtiḍā'* but a separate work which was probably composed prior to the fire of 886/1481.

85. See *Lisān al-ʿarab*, s.v. "*s*d*n*"; cf. al-Fīrūzābādī, "*sadana* means the servants of the Kaʿba or of the house of an idol and that which makes a veil/barrier (*ḥijāba*) is a *sādin*" (*Muḥīṭ*, s.v. "*s*d*n**").

86. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, p. 278.

87. Bernard Lewis, *EI* (2), s.v. "*khādim al-ḥaramayn*," points out that "it was from the sultans, not the caliphs, of Egypt that the Ottomans adopted this title." In his manual for government scribes, al-Qalqashandī, 6:46, specifically lists the title as being among the titles of the sultans. According to Lewis, the earliest known occurrence of the title is in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's restoration inscription on the tomb of the prophet Joseph in Jerusalem (Jerusalem, ii, no. 150 = *RCEA*, ix, no. 3447), and its introduction "was probably a move in the rivalry between Saladin and the caliph al-Nāṣir, over the leadership of the pilgrimage and related questions concerning the holy places in the Hidjaz." See also Emmanuel Sivan, "Saladin et le calife al-Nasir," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 13 (1972): 126–45. The epigraphic evidence presented by Jean Sauvaget on this title and on the title *malik al-qiblatayn* (king of the two *qiblas*) should be appended. See Sauvaget, *La Mosquée omeyyade de Médine: étude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique* (Paris, 1947), p. 44, n. 1.

88. Zayn al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra bi-talkhīs maʿālim dār al-hijra*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Jawwād al-Asmāʿī (Cairo, 1374/1955), p. 76.

89. The wazir in the story, as Moshe Perlmann points out, bears the same name as the wazir of the Mosul Zangids, al-Jawād al-Isfahānī, who died in prison in 558/1163. See Moshe Perlmann, "Asnawi's Tract Against Christian Officials," in *Ignaz Goldziher Memorial Volume, Part Two* (Jerusalem, 1958), p. 292n. The historical al-Isfahānī was the wazir not of Nūr al-Dīn in Damascus but of his father and brother in Mosul. For the biography of this wazir, see Shams al-Dīn Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1948), 4:228–232, no. 675. Al-Samhūdī (*Wafā'*, 2:651–52), was disturbed by this incongruity but came to the somewhat vague conclusion that al-Isfahānī must at some time also have served Nūr al-Dīn.

90. The historical Jamāl al-Dīn al-Isfahānī is also credited with having restored the Prophet's tomb and built walls for Madina which Nūr al-Dīn subsequently expanded. See al-Marāghī, p. 76, and al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 128. See also ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Athīr's biography of al-Isfahānī in *al-Kāmil fi' l-ta' rīkh* (Beirut, 1966), 11:306–10. Nūr al-Dīn is also credited with having canceled the noncanonical taxes on Madina. Montgomery Watt in his article in *EI* (2), s.v. "Madīna," mentions walls originally built by the Buyids being restored by a "Zengid vizier" in 540/1145 but does not give a source.

91. In one such account, set in the eleventh century, the Fatimid caliph of Egypt al-Ḥākim orders the removal of the bodies of the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and ʿUmar from the Prophet's tomb. A miraculous wind terminates this plot. In a similar narrative, set in the Mamluk period, it is the venal Shiʿi amir of Madina who attempts to sell the bodies of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar to Shiʿi agents from Iraq. A very localized earthquake in the *ḥaram* disposes of the Shiʿis. See *Wafāʾ*, 2:652–54; (al-Jāsir), pp. 151–52. For the anti-Shiʿi version of the story of Nūr al-Dīn and the Christian saboteurs, see Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Iyās, *Badāʾ iʿ al-zuhūr fi waqāʾ iʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden, 1975) 1, 1:241; cf. Längner, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 70–71.

92. Al-Samhūdī cites the author of this epistle as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asnāwī. He mentions that he read an authorized copy of the work which was in the handwriting of his own teacher, Zayn al-Dīn al-Marāghī. See *Wafāʾ* 2:648–52; cf. *Khulāṣat,* pp. 314–15; al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), pp. 127–39. Al-Marāghī (pp. 146–47) gives an abridged version of the story in his own history of Madina. Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Asnāwī's (d. 772/1370) epistle was edited by Moshe Perlmann (see note 89).

93. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, 2:652. The earliest version available to al-Samhūdī was that of the well-known Madinan scholar Jamāl al-Dīn al-Maṭarī (d. 741/1340). Al-Maṭarī claimed to have heard it from the jurist ʿAlam al-Dīn Yaʿqūb ibn Abī Bakr, "whose father was burnt to death on the night of the fire in the mosque" (in 658/1256), who had heard it from "someone who related it from among the oldest ones that I know of" (al-Maṭarī, p. 61), a chain of authorities that is atypically vague. In al-Maṭarī's version no mention is made of the ditch filled with molten lead.

94. See Ibn al-Athīr, 11:450–51; Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ismāʿīl Abū Shāma, *al-Rawḍatayn fi akhbār al-dawlatayn,* 2 vols. (Beirut, n.d.), 2:35–37. See also P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London, 1986), pp. 56–57.

95. This is the interpretation presented by Emel Esin, *Mecca the Blessed, Madina the Radiant* (New York, 1963), p. 158.

96. Al-Samhūdī, Wafāʾ, 2:653–54, and (al-Jāsir), pp. 151–52. For the full version of this story, see Chapter 3.

97. Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-intiṣār li-wāsiṭat ʿiqd al-amṣār* (Cairo 1309/1891–92), 5:33, on Naqqāda; ibid., 5:49, on Sindbīs. Cf. Heinz Hälm, *Ägypten nach den mamlukischen Lehensregistern.* Beihefte zum Tubinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, ser. B, Geisteswissenschaften no. 38, 2 vols. (Weisbaden, 1979–82), vol. 1, *Oberägypten und das Fayyum,* pp. 73–74, on Naqqāda; vol. 2, *Das Delta,* p. 36, on Sindbīs. Al-Maqrīzī also mentions the donation of the remaining two thirds of Sindbīs to the eunuchs in his *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk,* 12 pts. in 4 vols. (Cairo, 1934–73), 2:633; cf. Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in Islam," p. 271, n. 3.

98. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:584.

99. Kātib ʿAlī Efendi, *Waṣf al-madīna al-munawwara*, in *Rasā'il fī ta'rīkh al-madīna*, p. 77. Al-Jāsir reads "Makādda" for "Naqādda."

100. See J. Lecerf, *EI* (2), s.v. "Djiwar." See also Chapter 3.

101. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:51; cf. *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:37.

102. See, for example, al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw'*, 3:231, no. 881; 6:226, no. 764; 3:173, no. 667; 3:322, no. 1239; 2:326, no. 1064; 10:173, no. 733.

103. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:48ff; cf. *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:62ff. I have given the usual translations of the terms *Hindī, Takrūrī, Rūmī* and *Ḥabashī*. But these translations are, in fact, approximate renderings of ethnic/geographic categories which were quite fluid in medieval Arabic. The important point is not the exact origins of the eunuchs but their perceived ethnic diversity. This diversity reflects one of the features of eunuchs as a category in the Mamluk period. Unlike *fuḥūl* (uncastrated male) slaves, eunuchs were defined not primarily in terms of (perceived) ethnicity and/or skin color but in terms of their eunuchness.

The description of the ethnic composition of the eunuchs of the Prophet changes under the Ottomans. In 1607 the German soldier Johann Wild, who visited Madina as a slave, described the eunuchs as "black arabs" who were "completely castrated [*die sind ganz verschnitten*]." Johann Wild, "Aus der Reisebeschreibung des Johann Wild—Mekka und Medina," in *Dokumente zur Entdeckungsgeschichte*, vol. 1, *Arabien*, ed. Otto Baumhauer (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 68, excerpted from *Neue Reysbeschreibung eines gefangenen Christen Anno 1604*, ed. G. A. Narcis (Stuttgart, 1964), pp. 115–39. In 1586 the *kızlarağası*, the eunuch supervisor of the Ottoman royal harem, who was traditionally drawn from the corps of black eunuchs, gained control of the endowments (*awqāf*) of Mecca and Madina (see Bernard Lewis, *EI* (2), s.v. "*al-Ḥaramayn*"). From this point on, endowed positions in the eunuch societies of the holy cities were increasingly used as retirement posts and/or honorable exile for black eunuchs from the Ottoman harem and for the *kızlarağası* himself. In the eighteenth century there was still a contingent of eunuchs who were described as being from the Indian subcontinent (*Hunūd*). When Jean-Louis Burckhardt visited Mecca in 1814, he commented on the eunuch guardians of the Kaʿba that "most of the eunuchs, or Towashye, are negroes; a few were copper-colored Indians." See Jean-Louis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia, Comprehending an Account of Those Territories in Hedjaz Which the Mohammedans Regard as Sacred*, 2 vols. (London, 1829), 1:291.

104. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:62; cf. *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:49–50.

105. ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAsākir, *Ta'rīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 3:556 (Amman, 1331 A.H.).

106. On the quality of *mahāba* or *hayba* as a characteristic of the eunuchs of the Prophet, see Chapter 3.

107. On the rare occasions when the eunuchs were confronted with physical violence, they were at a distinct disadvantage. During the Mamluk period the *ḥāṣil,* or revenue, of the *ḥaram,* which was controlled by the eunuch *khāzindār,* or treasurer, was twice raided by rival claimants to the position of amir of Madina. But when the rebel Jammāz ibn Hibba tried to break into the *ḥujra* itself in 811/1408 to steal the gold and silver lamps, "God prevented him." See al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:584–86. In 901/1495 the eunuch *khāzindār* Aytimur al-Rūmī was reduced to giving the rebel Ḥasan ibn Zubayrī "a painful bite" in a futile attempt to prevent him from breaking open the *ḥāṣil* (ibid., 2:590).

108. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 4:1382.

109. On the terminology for eunuchs, see three essays by David Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in Islam," 67–124; "On the Term *Khādim* in the Sense of 'Eunuch' in the Early Muslim Sources," *Arabica* 32 (November 1985): 289–398; and "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," pp. 263–68, nn. 1, 1a.

110. The seventeenth-century Madinan scholar Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-ʿAbbāsī still used the term *ḥārat al-khuddām* in his *Kitāb ʿumdat al-akhbār fī madīnat al-mukhtār,* 2d ed., ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Anṣārī and Asʿad Darabāzūnī al-Ḥusaynī (Baghdad, n.d.), p. 212. For Kātib ʿAlī Efendi in the late nineteenth century, the same area is *ḥārat al-aghawāt khidmat sayyid al-kā'inat* (the quarter of the eunuchs, the servants of the prince of all creation). See *Waṣf al-madīna,* pp. 13, 18, 46, and passim. Al-Barzanjī consistently refers to the eunuchs as *al-aghawāt* in his *Nuzhat al-nāẓirīn.* The Iraqi educator and journalist Sulaymān Fayḍi, who made the pilgrimage and *ziyāra* in 1328/1910, described the eunuchs of Mecca as "the *aghawāt* of honored Mecca and the *khuddām* of the noble *ḥaram*" and those of Madina as "the *aghawāt* of the noble *ḥaram* and its *khuddām.*" See Sulaymān Fayḍī, *Kitāb al-tuḥfa al-īqāẓiyya fī'l-riḥla al-hijāziyya* (Basra, A.H. 1331), passim.

111. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:62; cf. *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:49–50.

112. Al-Qalqashandī 12:260. When Richard Burton visited Madina in the nineteenth century, he wrote: "The principal of the mosque, or Shaykh al-Harim, is no longer a neuter. The present is a Turkish pasha Osman. . . . His naib or deputy is a black eunuch, the chief of the Aghawat." See Richard Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Mecca,* 2 vols. (London, 1913), 1:371. Kātib ʿAlī Efendi describes the chief eunuch as *mustaslim:* "The meaning of *mustaslim* is that the noble *ḥaram* and the keys to the pure *ḥujra* are in his keeping [*fī taslīmihi*]." He explains that the position of *shaykh al-ḥaram* used to go to the former *kızlarağası* from the Ottoman palace, but now goes to a military official. Kātib ʿAlī, p. 71. The ritual role of the chief eunuch does not seem to have changed despite the probable loss of administrative and (direct) political power.

113. Al-Qalqashandī, 12:260.

114. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ,* 2:380.

115. Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 4, 2:961. Three years later the position was returned to a eunuch, al-Ṭawāshī Shāhīn al-Sāqī; ibid, 4, 3:1071.

116. Al-Sakhāwī describes Ibn Qāsim as "the first of the *fuhūl* that I know of"; *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:48; *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:48.

117. The sultan, however, was very partial to him and constantly praised his piety and his household ("*wa-lil-sulṭān ʿalayhi maylun tāmmun wa mubālaghatun fīʾl-thanāʾ ʿala dīnihi wa baytihi*"), that is, his slave household of origin (the *bayt* of Sultan Çakmak). Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:345–46, no. 585; *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:357–58, no. 585.

118. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Paul Kahle (Istanbul, 1931–45), 3:114. Cf. Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate," p. 271, n. 3. On Aynal's death in 888/1482, he was replaced by another freedman of Çakmak, Qānim al-Faqīh. Unlike Aynal, Qānim was not a military man but a scholar and a mystic who had seen the Prophet in visions and who "was deluged with blessings [*barakāt*] to the point that he was appointed to the position of *shaykh* of the eunuchs of the Prophet's *haram*." Al-Sakhāwī, who granted Qānim an *ijāza* (license to teach his works), held Qānim in high regard. See *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 3:409–10, 3471. On Qānim's death in 889/1483, he was replaced by another mamluk, Shāhīn al-Jamālī, the freedman of the powerful civilian official Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Kātib Jākim. Shāhīn was temporarily deposed in favor of a white eunuch, al-Ṭawāshī Iyās al-Ashrafī, but regained the position on Iyās's death. Shāhīn, who held the rank of amir of ten (the lowest rank of mamluk officer) had received an excellent education in jurisprudence. Along with his brother Sunqur al-Jamālī (both men, described as *rūmī al-jins*, were enslaved together as children and sold along with their mother to Jamāl al-Dīn), Shāhīn had held various important positions supervising the construction or reconstruction of mosques and *madrasa* complexes for the sultan. His brother Sunqur had been responsible for the reconstruction of the Prophet's *ḥaram* after the fire of 886/1481. Shāhīn was an active and very pious *shaykh al-ḥaram* and was lauded by al-Sakhāwī, who predeceased him, as well as by the anonymous student of al-Sakhāwī who completed the *Tuḥfa*. See *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 2:262–64, no. 1723; *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 2:210–12, no. 1723. Al-Sakhāwī's comments on Shāhīn in his discussion of the office of *shaykh al-khuddām* are revelatory: "He was the most like them [the eunuchs] in his ways"; *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:48; *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:62. After the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, the position was given back to the eunuchs and often became a retirement (or exile) post for the ex-*kızlarağası* of Topkapı.

119. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:50; *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:63.

120. Al-ʿAbbāsī, p. 95.

121. Al-Barzanjī, p. 90. Al-Barzanjī is quoting from a book titled *al-Dhikr al-nāfiʿ*, by one al-ʿAllāma ibn Sulaymān, who is in turn quoting from *Falāh al-fallāḥ* by Khayr al-Dīn Ilyās al-Madanī. In a separate passage (pp. 56–57) al-

Barzanjī identifies the former as al-ʿAllāma Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kurdī al-Madanī, who composed his work on Madina, *al-Dhikr al-nāfiʿ*, in the year 1158/1745. Brockelmann, *GAL* (2), 2:529, mentions a Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kurdī (d. 1194/1780), who composed a legal commentary titled *al-Ḥawāshī al-madanīya*. Ilyās al-Madanī is cited by Brockelmann as Khayr al-Dīn Ilyāszade (d. 1134/1721), author of *Falāḥ al-fallāḥ;* see *GAL* (2), 2:596; 2:667. It is possible that "wazir" may be a reference to al-Isfahānī, who figures so prominently in the legend of Nūr al-Dīn and the Christian saboteurs. Ilyās al Madanī's inclusion of a kind of ethnic hierarchy among the eunuchs of the Prophet may represent concerns of his own time. Earlier accounts contain no reference to preferential treatment given to any one ethnic group. When al-Sakhāwī described the eunuchs in the late fifteenth century, the *Hindīs* were in the majority; see *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:50. Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kurdī added to Ilyās's account: "In our time, if there are *Hunūd* among them, they stand out as oddities among the majority" (al-Barzanjī, p. 90).

122. Al-Barzanjī, p. 91.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibn al-Najjār, pp. 358–360. See also J. Pedersen, *EI* (2), s.v. "*masdjid.*" For a survey of the early architechtural history of the *ḥaram,* see Sauvaget, *La mosquée,* pp. 40–68.

125. Al-Maṭarī, pp. 23–24; al-Marāghī, p. 27.

126. Al-Maṭarī, p. 41; al-Marāghī, p. 81.

127. Ibn al-Najjār, p. 393.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibn al-Najjār, p. 359; al-Marāghī, p. 82. One tradition held that Fāṭima was buried in her room. This *ḥujra* added to the number of tombs (and the total "charge" of *baraka*) in the *ḥaram.*

130. Ibn al-Najjār, p. 399; al-Samhūdī, 2:576–81.

131. Al-Samhūdī, 2:581–84.

132. Ibid., 2:568.

133. "Around the tomb is a balustrade so that no one can get in." Nasir-i Khusraw, *Safarnama: Naser-e Khosraw's Book of Travels,* trans. with notes by W. M. Thackston, Jr. (New York, 1986), p. 59.

134. Ibn al-Najjār, pp. 395–96; al-Maṭarī, p. 41; al-Marāghī, pp. 82–83.

135. Al-Marāghī, p. 106.

136. Ibn al-Najjār, p. 396.

137. Al-Samhūdī, 2:569–70.

138. Al-Samhūdī, 2:633–37. Cf. al-Marāghī, pp. 68–70, and Sauvaget, *La mosquée,* p. 42. See also the contemporary account of Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāma, *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa'l-sābiʿ* (Cairo, 1366/1947), pp. 192–94.

139. Al-Samhūdī, 2:633–37.

140. Abū Shāma gives the text of a letter from the Shiʿi Qadi of Madina describing the lava and the earthquake that preceded it. This vivid account was written while the fire was still spreading outside the city and the people had taken refuge in the mosque. See Abū Shāma, pp. 190–92. Cf. al-Marāghī, pp. 68–69; al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), pp. 141–48.

141. Abū Shāma, p. 193.

142. Ibid., p. 194.

143. *King Lear* 1.2.101–2.

144. The Shiʿi *wazīr* of al-Mustaʿṣim, Muʾayyad al-Dīn, "The Supporter of the Faith," referred to by the Sunnis as "Khādhil al-Dīn," or "Deserter of the Faith," is portrayed by the Sunni authors as having betrayed the city of Baghdad to the Mongols in retaliation for Sunni destruction of Shiʿi lives and property during sectarian riots. Al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), pp. 152–55; cf. Abū Shāma, p. 199.

145. *King Lear* 1.2.109–12.

146. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, 2:600, drawing on early Madinan sources, presents the story of the verses appearing on the charred walls of the mosque. Abū Shāma, who was alive at the time of the fire, gives the same verses as his own (Abū Shāma, p. 194).

147. Al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 148. On the Shiʿi–Sunni battle for control of the *ḥaram,* see Chapter 3.

148. See *EI* (2), s.v. "ʿAyn Djālūt." The Mamluks incorporated ʿAyn Jalūt into their state propaganda. The fact that Quṭuz and Baybars had not faced Hülegü himself but had barely managed to defeat the vastly outnumbered and battle-weary force of the Mongol general Kitbogha did not, in the popular consciousness, diminish the "miraculous" nature of their victory. Abū Shāma's statement that "it is one of the wondrous events that the Tatars were defeated and destroyed by the sons of their *jins* from among the Turks" (p. 209) was to become a standard topos in the subsequent discussions of ʿAyn Jalūt.

149. See David Ayalon, "Studies on the Transfer of the Abbasid Caliphate from Baghdad to Cairo," *Arabica* 7 (1960): 41–59.

150. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, 1:204–5.

151. Sauvaget makes this observation in his study of the architectural history of the mosque, *La mosquée,* pp. 43–44. One has only to survey the lists of Mamluk renovations and contributions to the *ḥaram* to see his point.

152. On the *maqṣūra,* see J. Pedersen, *EI* (2), s.v. "*masdjid,*" p. 661.

153. "But it is important to recognize that al-Ẓāhir had a precedent in this, for ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz also separated off part of the *rawḍa* when he put up the enclosure around the *ḥujra*—but this was only a small part and God knows best"; al-Marāghī, p. 85. cf. al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, 2:613.

154. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, 2:615.

155. Opposing *fatwa*s were issued at the same time by two different *qadi*s,

one of whom maintained that the doors should stay open while the other argued that they should be closed. The *qadi* who argued for closing the doors was soon promoted to the office of supervisor of the Chancery in Cairo, and his influence prevailed. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:613.

156. Ibid., 2:615.

157. Ibid., 2:617.

158. This passage from Ibn Farḥūn is quoted in al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:53; *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:39 (the editor's reading of *ʿulamā'* for *ghilmān* in the first edition is an error. The Topkapı manuscript of this work supports the reading "*ghilmān*"). Cf. al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 149; al-Barzanjī, p. 89. Almost a century after the actual event, al-Samhūdī would comment: "This is the reason for placing the 'row of the eunuchs' on Friday in front of the *khaṭīb*. [The custom] has remained after the disappearance of its cause—may God be praised." Al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 149.

159. Sultan Baybars initiated a policy of sending Sunni scholars to Madina from Egypt to hold official positions in the *ḥaram* and to counter the influence of the dominant Shiʿi *ʿulamā'* families. The first such emissaries were three muezzins sent from Cairo to hold the office of chief muezzin for the three existing minarets. Two of the three, Aḥmad ibn Khalaf, from the village of Maṭariyya (*al-Tuḥfa* [1979], 1:178, no. 185; *al-Tuḥfa* [1957–58], 1:62, no. 185), and Muḥammad ibn Murtaḍa al-Kinānī, from Cairo (ibid. [1979] 1:52; [1957–58], 1:38), would be the progenitors of important Sunni families in Madina: the Ḥānafī Maṭariyyūn and the Shāfiʿī Kināniyyūn. These two families, along with others founded by immigrants, would provide prominent leaders of the anti-Shiʿi faction. Ibn Farḥūn also gives a great deal of credit to the vizier Ibn Hannā, who, during his stay in Madina in 701, promoted the Sunni faction and repressed the Shiʿi scholarly families. See al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 143.

160. In the Sunni literature the term *mujāwirūn* is never applied to the Shiʿis living in the Prophet's *ḥaram*. They are *ahl al-sharr* (the people of evil), *al-mubtadiʿūn* (the innovators), *al-rawāfiḍ* (the refusers).

161. One of the sources for al-Sakhāwī's "hagiography" of the eunuchs of the Prophet was Jamāl al-Dīn al-Maṭarī, son of one of the muezzins sent from Cairo, a renowned and vehemently anti-Shiʿi jurist (*al-Tuḥfa* [1979], 3:466, no. 3608). Another source, Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ (ibid. [1979], 3:583–85, no. 3798), was the son of a wealthy Sunni craftsman, a painter (or plasterer) from Cairo who had settled in Madina (ibid. [1979], 2:228, no. 1760; [1957–58], 2:287, no. 1760). The latter may have been sent by the sultan along with the team of workers and craftsmen who came from Cairo to repair the ravages of the first fire in the mosque early in Baybars's reign. Al-Sakhāwī's third and by far most important source, Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn, was the son of the Mālikī jurist Muḥammad ibn Farḥūn, who left his home in North Africa to take up residence in Madina in obedience to what he interpreted as a divine command. He served

as a deputy (*nā'ib*) to the beleagured Sirāj al-Dīn and founded the leading Mālikī family of Madina, the illustrious Banū Farḥūn (ibid. [1979], 3:706–11, no. 4066).

162. Badr al-Dīn ibn Farḥūn wrote of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Maṭarī: "After our father, we found no one like him in kindness to us and compassion for us. He took charge of our upbringing and our education and concern for our welfare like our father" (ibid. [1979], 2:468). Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kinānī, the son of the second of the muezzins sent by Baybars, stood as guarantor for Jamāl al-Dīn al-Maṭarī's son when he was imprisoned by the amir of Madina. For Badr al-Dīn, Muḥammad al-Kinānī was "one of our loved ones and our companions, rather, one of our sons" (ibid. [1979], 3:456, no. 3597). Similarly, Ibn Ṣāliḥ was close to the Banū Farḥūn. Badr al-Dīn Ibn Farḥūn's father, Muḥammad, used to tell Ibn Ṣāliḥ stories of his father, who had died when Ibn Ṣāliḥ was only four years old, and whom the elder Ibn Farḥūn described as "one of the saints [*min al-awliyā'*]" (ibid. [1979], 3:584).

163. Al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 139, quoting Ibn Farḥūn.

164. Ibid. The rulers of Madina, who claimed descent from the Prophet through his grandson Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, are referred to by the Sunni authors as *al-ashrāf* or *al-shurafā'*. Both words are plurals of *sharīf*, which can mean "noble" as well as "descendant of the Prophet." When these terms are used to refer to the local rulers of Madina, I have translated them as "lords."

165. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:52–53; *al-Tuḥfa* (1957–58), 1:39.

166. Al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 149.

167. ʿAbd al-Raḥman ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar* (Beirut, 1979), 4:109.

168. On the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*) as a symbol of political legitimacy, see Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago, 1988), p. 127, n. 51. Even before the end of the Fatimid dynasty, the *ashrāf* had periodically allowed the ʿAbbasid caliph to be named in their Friday sermons. For a discussion of the shifting loyalties of the lords of the Hijaz in the late eleventh century, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs, Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 207.

169. For later Mamluk authors, the apparent indifference of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Nūr al-Dīn to the Shiʿi control of religious offices in Madina was disturbing. Their failure to "sunnify" Madina is excused by their preoccupation with the Holy War. But al-Samhūdī, following Ibn Farḥūn, also points out that the then Shiʿi amir of Madina, Qāsim ibn Muhannā, was an important military ally of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, and "no one dared to bring up the issue of the Shiʿis [of Madina] in those days." Al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), p. 149.

170. This is certainly how his actions were interpreted by his Sunni contemporaries. Al-Sakhāwī, quoting from an earlier source, writes: "He used to give the *khuṭba* from the pulpit and pronounce God's approval of the 'companions.' Then he would go home and expiate that with a ram which he would have

slaughtered and distributed as alms. He used to do that every Friday after the prayers." Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 3:196. The formulaic blessing of the "companions" was distinctly Sunni since, in pronouncing God to be pleased with Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān, the *khaṭīb* granted legitimacy to caliphs whom the Shiʿis regarded as enemies of ʿAlī and usurpers of his rightful position.

171. The account of Sirāj al-Dīn's difficult career and his gradual promotion to greater authority in Madina is given in *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:52–53; (1957–58), 1:39–40. Al-Samhūdī gives a long account of the Sunni battle against the Shiʿi scholarly families in al-Samhūdī (al-Jāsir), pp. 141–50. When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Madina in 1326, the sorrows of Sirāj al-Dīn had entered the realm of popular narrative. The Prophet replaces the sultan as the authority who compells Sirāj al-Dīn, through visionary dreams, to remain in Madina. When the preacher, as an old man, finally attempts to disregard the dreams and return to Egypt, he is struck dead on the road. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1:279–80.

172. Al-Qalqashandī, 12:260–62, repeatedly describes the eunuchs of the sanctuary of Madina as having entered "the service of the Prophet [*khidmat al-rasūl*]" or as being in "his [the Prophet's] noble service [*khidmatihi al-sharīfa*]." The expression "the doors of the sultan" is a translation of *al-abwāb al-sulṭāniyya,* which is literally "the sultanic doors" or "the sultanic portals." Al-Qalqashandī, 12:260, confines his use of the term *ṭawashī,* a common euphemism for "eunuch," to these royal eunuchs "from the doors of the sultan," just as al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ* 2:380, distinguishes the *ṭawashīya* as "the royal eunuchs [*al-khuddām al-mulūkiyya*]."

173. Some, like Bilāl al-Mugīthī, who had "related *ḥadīth* in Cairo and Damascus," and Kāfūr al-Khiḍrī, "famous for high *riwāyas,*" were themselves respected and sought-after Sunni scholars. On Bilāl, see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:384–85, no. 667; (1957), 1:373–74, no. 667; on Kāfūr, see ibid. (1979), 3:425, no. 3509. The "high *riwāya*" was an unimpeachable chain of transmission for a *ḥadīth.*

174. Al-Qalqashandī, 12:260.

175. For a discussion of the turbulent relationship between the lords of the Hijaz and the Mamluk sultans, see A. J. Wensinck and C. E. Bosworth, *EI* (2), s.v. "Makka."

176. For a discussion of the term *ṭāʾifa* in an earlier context, see Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980), p. 184.

177. Al-Qalqashandī, 12:261.

178. Ibid.

179. Al-Subkī, *Muʿīd,* p. 56.

180. Ibid., pp. 54–55.

181. Ibid., p. 56.

182. Ibid.

183. On the hermaphrodite, see Sanders, "Gendering the Ungendered Body."

184. Al-Subkī, *Muʿīd,* p. 56.

185. See the biography of the chief eunuch ʿIzz al-Dīn Dīnār, in *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 2:42, no. 1195; (1957–58), 2:43, no. 1195.

186. The biography of Kāfūr al-Ḥarīrī is absent in the 1957–58 edition of *al-Tuḥfa* and incomplete in the 1979 edition (3:425, no. 3511, three lines of text). Although the editor maintains, in a footnote, that the original is not clear, the biography of Kāfūr al-Ḥarīrī in the Istanbul ms. of the *Tuḥfa* (Topkapı Sarayı, Medine 527, fols. 693–94) is easily legible. All future references to this biography will be based on the manuscript.

187. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership,* p. 184.

188. *Al-Tuḥfa* (Topkapı Sarayı, Medine 527), fol. 694. Compare this description of Kāfūr's *hayba* to the definition in *Lisān al-ʿarab,* s.v. "h*y*b": "*Hayba* is *mahāba* which is [the ability to inspire] reverence and fear [*al-hayba al-mahāba wa hiyya al-ijlāl waʾl makhāfa*]." Cf. the definition in the *Muḥīṭ,* "*Hayba* is [based on] fear [*makhāfa*] and caution [*taqiyya*]." *Al-Muḥīṭ,* p. 146.

189. *Al-Tuḥfa* (1979) 2:221, no. 1745; (1957–58), 2:277–78, no. 1745.

190. Ibid. (1979), 3:189–90, no. 2974. Cf. Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Hajar, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī aʿyān al-miʾa al-thāmina,* 4 vols. (Cairo, 1380/1960–61), 4:393, no. 1078.

191. *Al-Durar al-kāmina,* 4:408–9, no. 1128. Yāqūt's piety was evidenced by his refusal of any income from the *mukūs* (plural of *maks*), the so-called noncanonical taxes. Since these taxes were not legislated in the Qurʾan but introduced by temporal rulers, many pious Muslims considered them illicit. See *EI* (2), s.v. "*maks.*"

192. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (Topkapı Sarayı, Medine 527), fols. 693–94.

193. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 1:384–85, no. 667; (1957), 1:373–74, no. 667.

194. "*Kāna khādiman shaklan wa-ṭiwālan aʿẓam abnāʾ jildatihi haybatan wa-siyālan.*" I have translated "sons of his skin" as "race," but it could also be translated as "ethnicity." Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 2:221, no. 1745. This reading matches that of the Istanbul ms., fol. 377. The 1957–58 edition presents the reading of this line as "*kasā jildatahu haybatan wa-ṣiyālan* [he clothed his skin in dread and authority]," 2:277–78, no. 1745. Despite the reference to the race or ethnicity of Shafīʿ, his biographers do not specify his origins.

195. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (Topkapı Sarayı, Medine 527), fols. 693–94.

196. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa* (1979), 2:247–48, no. 1830; (1957–58), 2:312–14, no. 1830.

197. Ibid.

198. Ibid., 2:121 (1979), no. 1440; (1957–58), 2:144, no. 1440.

199. Ibid. (1979), 2:40–42, no. 1195; (1957–58), 1:42–46, no. 1195.

200. This same Dīnār was also known as a peacemaker: "As for his endeavors

to promote concord and heal differences among people and to bring together brothers and promote harmony among opponents, he was one of the wonders of the time." Al-Sakhāwī, *Tuḥfa* (1979), 2:43–45, no. 1196; (1957–58), 2:46–48, no. 1196.

201. Ibid. (1979), 3:425, no. 3509.

202. Ibid. (1979), 2:65, no. 1268; (1957–58), 2:74–75, no. 1268.

203. Ibid. (1979), 2:40–43, no. 1195; (1957–58), 2:42–46, no. 1195.

204. Ibid.

205. Ibid. (1979), 2:42–43, no. 1196; (1957–58), 2:46–48, no. 1196.

206. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 61. This includes several documents covering the time period from 26 Ramaḍān 807 (March 25, 1405) through 8 Safar 824 (February 14, 1421); cf. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 75, which is a copy of the documents included in no. 61.

207. On the term *baṭṭāl* and the position of the banished mamluk, see Ayalon, "Discharges from Service, Banishments, and Imprisonments in Mamlūk Society," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 25–50; rpt. in *The Mamluk Military Society*.

208. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 222, 15 Rābiʿ II 904 (November 30, 1498).

209. *"Ila al-umara' al-khuddām al-fuqara' al-baṭṭālīn al-mujāwirīn bi-ḥaram sayyidna rasūl allah,* Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 274, 26 Rābiʿ II 717 (July 8, 1317).

210. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 61.

211. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 71, 5 Ramaḍān 803 (April 19, 1401); 27 Shawwāl 818 (December 30, 1415).

212. Awqāf, no. 188j, 1 Rābiʿ II 837 (November 15, 1433).

213. Awqāf, no. 71j, 7 Shawwāl 807 (April 18, 1404).

214. Dar al-Wathā'iq, no. 44, 29 Jumādi II, 722 (July 15, 1322).

215. See note 203.

216. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 101, documents covering the years 846 to 849. For a biography of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf (d. 854), see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw'*, 4:341, no. 954.

217. On the use of the florin as currency under the Mamluks, see E. Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), p. 138.

218. Dār al-Wathā'iq, no. 90, Safar 839 (September, 1435).

219. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:656, quoting al-Aqshahirī (d. 739/1309), author of *al-Rawḍa al-firdawsiya* (*GAL* [2], 2:222).

220. Al-Marāghī, p. 107.

221. Al-Samhūdī presents this narrative as a lengthy quotation which he ascribes to Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī's *al-Riyāḍ al-nādira fī faḍā'il al-ʿāshira*. I could not find this anecdote in the published version of this work, *al-Riyāḍ al-nādira fī manāqib al-ʿāshira* (Cairo, A.H. 1327). In al-Samhūdī's text, al-Ṭabarī says he heard the story from Hārūn ibn al-Shaykh ʿUmar ibn al-Za'ib, who heard it from his father, Shaykh ʿUmar, who heard it from his friend, the chief eunuch Ṣawwāb al-Lamaṭī. Al-Samhūdī then adds his own second chain of authorities.

The same story, he says, appears in shortened form in al-Marjānī's (d. 699/1299) history of Madina, *Bahjat al-nufūs wa'l-asrār fī ta'rīkh madīnat al-mukhtār;* see *GAL* (2), 2:927. Al-Marjānī claims to have the story on the authority of his father, who had heard it from his own father (who heard it from a eunuch of the Prophet's tomb) as well as directly from a eunuch. Al-Barzanjī also relates this story, but he uses the same sources and seems to be presenting an abridgment of al-Samhūdī's text. See al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:653–54, and al-Barzanjī, p. 82.

222. Al-Barzanjī, citing Ibn Farḥūn, p. 85.

223. Ibid., p. 86.

224. Ibid.

225. Al-Qalqashandī, 12:261.

226. Al-Shāfiʿī's principle was that any good innovation that did not contradict the Qur'an, the *sunna,* the *ijmāʿ* (consensus of the community), or the *āthār* (traditions traced not to the Prophet but to the *salaf,* the men of the early community, the Companions and Followers) is potentially praiseworthy (*maḥmūda*). Despite this fairly broad interpretation of "good" *bidʿa,* the question has always been an explosive one. See J. Robson, *EI* (2), s.v. "*bidʿa*"; Ignaz Goldziher, "Hadith and Sunna," in *Muslim Studies,* vol. 2, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, ed. S. M. Stern (London, 1971), pp. 33–38. See also Bernard Lewis, "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam," *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953): 52ff.

227. See, e.g., al-ʿAbbāsī, p. 95; al-Barzanjī, p. 90.

228. Al-Marāghī, p. 75.

229. On the *dikka,* see al-Barzanjī, p. 35, and Kātib ʿAlī Efendī, p. 59. For descriptions of the *dikka* by nineteenth-century European observers, see Eldon Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia,* 2 vols. (London, 1928), 2:235, who points out that the *dikka* has the advantage of facing both the *qibla* and the Prophet's tomb. Burton, *Personal Narrative,* p. 204n., describes the *dikka* as "a raised bench of stone and wood on the North side of the Hujra." A. J. B. Wavell, *A Modern Pilgrimage in Mecca and a Siege in Sanaa* (Boston, 1928), p. 71, mentions that the *dikka* is "for the exclusive use of the eunuchs" and that "twenty or thirty of them are generally to be found there, chatting or reading. Night and day there is always someone on guard." On the original *ahl al-ṣuffa,* see Montgomery Watt, *EI* (2), s.v. "Madina," pp. 266–67, and J. Pedersen, *EI* (2), s.v. "*masdjid.*" Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:454. The *ṣuffa,* which is also described as a *ẓulla,* is probably more correctly translated as "arbor" or "awning".

230. Al-Marāghī, p. 76; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:690, 732.

231. Al-Barzanjī, p. 34.

232. Al-Qalqashandī, 12:262.

233. Ibid.

234. For a discussion of this work, see note 84.

235. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:550–55, 561, 563, 566; Al-Samhūdī, under very unusual circumstances, was actually allowed to see what was visible of the interior of the collapsed tomb after the second fire. The dispute over the location of the tombs of the Prophet, of ʿUmar, and of Abū Bakr was a serious issue when it came to the restoration of the *ḥujra*. As the recognized historian par excellence of the *ḥaram*, al-Samhūdī appears to have been called in as a kind of expert witness. Much to his disappointment, he saw no above-ground trace of the actual tombs: "*Wa lam ajid li'l-qubūr al-sharīfa atharan*" (*Khulaṣat*, p. 309).

236. Al-Samhūdī's long account of the difficulties involved in deciding on and executing repairs to the *ḥujra* presents a vivid picture of the "fear and trembling" that greeted even the suggestion of tampering in any way with the Prophet's household/tomb.

237. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 3:261.

238. Ibn Jubayr, p. 196.

239. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 2:682.

240. Ibid., quoting Ibn Farḥūn.

241. Ibid., quoting al-Fīrūzābādī.

242. Ibid., 2:683.

243. Burton, *Personal Narrative*, 1:225–26, adds in a footnote (p. 226) concerning the lote tree: "The fruit called Nebek, is eaten, and the leaves are used for the purpose of washing dead bodies." Al-Barzanjī, p. 91, mentions seven palms and the lote tree. A fervent supporter of the *aghawāt*, al-Barzanjī quotes al-Fīrūzābādī but questions the harshness of the latter's attack on the eunuchs. He points out that there is no firm consensus (*ijmāʿ*) among the learned that the date palms are indeed *munkar* (objectionable). One might argue that the palms "benefit the worshippers by their shade," but "God knows best." Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:182, also described the garden.

244. Al-Barzanjī, p. 90. In 1328/1920 the Iraqi journalist Sulaymān Fayḍī employed a similar argument in his description of the "exalted *aghas* of noble Mecca, both great and small," the members of the sister society to that of Madina, who treated him with great hospitality during his pilgrimage. He commented that "this comes from no reason other than the excellent character which they all share . . . and it is no wonder that they have such fine characters since they are the servants of the Sacred House of God." Fayḍī, *Kitāb al-tuḥfa al-īqāẓīya*, p. 121.

245. Ibid.

246. Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidā'*, p. 376.

247. Tāqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Shifāʿ al-saqām fī ziyārat khayr al-anām* (Beirut, 1971), p. 80.

248. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'*, 1:31.

249. See Tor Andrae, *Die Persons Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben Seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm, 1917), pp. 286–89.

250. Al-Marāghī, p. 119. Al-Marāghī presents the tradition (which seems to have been widely accepted by his contemporaries) that the Prophet had been poisoned and had thus died a martyr.

251. Al-Marāghī, pp. 80ff.

252. See Shaun Marmon, "Slavery, Islamic," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Strayer et al. (New York, 1984) 3:527–29.

253. See *EI* (2), s.v. "*bulūgh.*"

254. Al-Sakhāwī, quoting al-Maqrīzī, *ʿUqūd al-farīda*, in *al-Iʿlān biʾl-tawbīkh li-man dhamma ahl al-taʾrīkh;* trans. in Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952), p. 317.

255. Quoted in Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in Islam," p. 84.

256. An interesting point of comparison lies in the cult of Artemis in ancient Greece. According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, *La Mort dans les yeux: figures de l'Autre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1985), Artemis, as the Kourotrophos, the patroness of the young, serves both to delineate the boundaries between childhood and adulthood and, through rites of initiation, to lead the child across those boundaries to his or her fully gendered adult identity. The swift-footed Atalanta, who forces her suitors to run races with her and to suffer the penalty of death when they lose, is the ultimate virgin of Artemis. Raised and suckled in the forest by a female bear, Atalanta refuses to cross the boundary into adulthood and marriage:

> Atalante reduit la fémininité entière à son stade preliminaire; elle refuse de connaître et de franchir la frontière qui sépare l'altérité juvénile de l'identité adulte; c'est pourquoi, chez Atalante, tout se brouille: en elle, l'enfant, la *pais*, ne se distingue pas de la femme mûre; la fille, au lieu de se démarquer du garçon, bascule vers une hypervirilité; la créature humaine se fait ourse. (p. 20)

As Vernant points out, however, this violation of boundaries (and mixing of categories) cannot be tolerated. Atalanta is ultimately punished by Aphrodite both with an imposed marriage and with reduction to animal status (p. 21). Unlike Atalanta, or any human child, the eunuchs, by virtue of their castration, were removed from the normal path that leads across the boundaries between childhood and gendered adulthood. And unlike the hermaphrodite (see Sanders, "Gendering the Ungendered Body"), whose very existence confuses those boundaries, or the voluntary celibate, who defies them, the eunuch did not violate the natural process of maturation since he was completely outside of it.

257. See note 63.

258. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, 4:1382–84.

259. See Chapter 2.

260. J. F. T. Keane, *Six Months in the Hejaz* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), pp. 224–26.

261. Christiaan Snouck Hurgrönje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century,* trans. J. H. Monahan (London, 1931), p. 222.

262. Ibid., p. 122, n. 1.

263. Sulaymān Fayḍī, p. 293.

264. For an interesting account of the free movement of children between separate realms in the pre–World War I Ottoman royal household, see Musbah Haidar, *Arabesque* (London, 1944), passim. In this same context Haidar describes a close relationship between eunuchs and children (pp. 78–79). As *sharīfa*s, or descendants of the Prophet, Haidar and her sister were given special consideration by the eunuchs in the Ottoman palace:

> The fun was contagious for there were no children in all that gloomy palace; and these gentle creatures [the eunuchs] always nourished a great love and adoration for them, especially for these two little Sherifas whom they would call *bizim kilar!* (One belonging to us!) Musbah never quite knew whether this meant belonging to the African race or to the odd community of eunuchs! (p. 79)

265. Kātib ʿAlī Efendī, p. 69.

266. The city of Madina surrendered to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz on December 15, 1925. Rutter had set out on his pilgrimage in May of that same year.

267. The founder of the Wahhabi, or, more properly, the *muwaḥḥidūn* (monotheist) movement, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1115/1703–1201/1787), followed the Ḥanbalī school according to the radical interpretation of the medieval jurist Ibn Taymiyya, who had condemned any innovation (*bidʿa*) introduced into the practice of the Muslim community later than the third century of Islam. Like Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was primarily concerned with eliminating tomb-centered cults and the seeking of intercession from the dead. In 1745 he allied himself with the amir of Darʿīya, Muḥammad ibn Saʿūd, the ancestor of the current ruling house of Saudi Arabia and the first political leader of the Wahhabi movement. For the Wahhabi definition of *bidʿa,* see the summary of the doctrines of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in D. S. Margoliouth, *EI* (1), s.v. "Wahhābīya", and Henri Laoust, *EI* (2), s.v. "Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb." Eldon Rutter's firsthand observations of the neo-Wahhabi policies of Ibn Saʿūd and of the reaction—or nonreaction—of the eunuchs of the holy cities are recorded in his account of his sojourn in the Hijaz, *The Holy Cities of Arabia,* esp. 2:265–68.

268. Ibid., 2:201.

269. Burton, *Personal Narrative,* 2:324, n. 1.

270. On European travelers to the Hijaz, see Augustus Ralli, *Christians in Mecca* (London, 1909); David Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia* (New York, 1904); Firmin Duguet, *Le pèlerinage de la Mecque au point de vue religieux, social et sanitaire* (Paris, 1932), pp. 286–96; Zahra Freeth and H. V. F.

Winstone, *Explorers of Arabia: From the Renaissance to the End of the Victorian Era* (New York, 1978). Of these surveys of the travel literature, Ralli's and Duguet's, though dated, are still the most informative.

271. On the title *ṭawāshi al-nabī* for the eunuchs of Mecca, see Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia,* 1:291.

272. Rutter, *Holy Cities,* 1:267.

273. Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia,* 2:187.

274. *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century as Described by Joseph Pitts, William Daniel and Charles Jacques Poncet,* ed. William Foster (London, 1949), p. 18.

275. It has been suggested to me by Marilyn Sanders, M.D., of the University of Connecticut that the physical appearance of the eunuchs of the Dār al-Islām was probably the result of the hormonal imbalance caused by prepubertal castration. This is borne out by a clinical description of the effects of prepubertal castration:

> The effects of castration on the body, when it is performed on a boy before puberty, are the same as . . . for complete testicular failure. The eunuch retains a soprano voice and grows no beard. His arms and legs grow disproportionately long, relative to the trunk. Pubic and axillary hair grows (presumably under the influence of adrenal androgens), but, along with body hair, is feminine in pattern. There is no masculine balding. Subcutaneous fat deposits are feminine in distribution.

John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: The Differentiation and Dimorphism of Gender Identity from Conception to Maturity* (Baltimore, 1972), p. 218.

276. Rutter, *Holy Cities,* 1:266.

277. This explanation is also presented in William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman Control, 1840–1908* (Columbus, 1984), p. 51: "In Mecca and Medina, the need to provide guards who could with propriety supervise female pilgrims led to the use of eunuchs." On eunuchs and women in an Ottoman *ferman* concerning the sanctuary of Hebron, see Chapter 1. The placing of eunuch guardians in any tomb, whether that of a Prophet, a sultan, or a wealthy civilian bureaucrat, was an act of great symbolic density. There is no doubt that it was, among other things, connected with a desire to avoid the *fitna,* or moral disruption, caused by the presence of women in the world of the dead, an oddly inverted world which was highly charged with powerful and potentially dangerous forces.

278. Johann Wild, "Aus der Reisebeschreibung des Johann Wild," pp. 115–39. Wild's "Hadim" is the arabic *khādim* (servant), one of the most common euphemisms for "eunuch" in both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish.

279. Pitts, *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries,* p. 46. Pitts, who had been

enslaved at the age of sixteen or seventeen, brutally beaten by his first master, and forcibly converted to Islam, was a most unwilling pilgrim. His description of the pilgrimage and of the Two Sanctuaries is nonetheless vivid and detailed. Neither Wild nor Pitts makes any mention of the eunuch society guarding the Kaʿba.

280. Carsten Niebuhr, *Description de l'Arabie* (Copenhagen, 1773), p. 322. This explanation is left out of Robert Heron's English translation of Niebuhr's travels, which simply reads: "This building is guarded by forty eunuchs, chiefly for the security of the treasure which is said to be kept in it." *Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1792), 2:41.

281. Burton, *Personal Narrative*, 1:371, n. 1.

282. Ibid., 1:308, n. 4; 1:315–16; 1:316, nn. 1, 2; 1:321, n. 2; 2:315–16, 322, 331, 333, 337; cf. Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 1:290; 2:186–87.

283. Burton, *Personal Narrative*, 2:341. Cf. Kātib ʿAlī Efendī's description of the eunuch ritual of changing the *kiswa*, p. 69; and see Chapter 4.

284. Snouck Hurgrönje, *Mekka*, p. 20.

285. J. F. T. Keane, *Six Months in Mecca* (London, 1881), pp. 100–1. The more complete account of Keane's experiences, which also contains his description of Madina, is his *Six Months in the Hijaz*.

286. Domingo Badia y Leiblich (ʿAlī Bey al-ʿAbbāsī), *Travels of ʿAli Bey*, 2 vols. (London, 1806; rpt. Westmead, Eng., 1970), 2:54.

287. Burton, *Pilgrimage to el-Medinah and Meccah* (New York, 1856), p. 219; Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 1:291.

288. Rutter, *Holy Cities*, 1:267.

289. Ibid.

290. Burton, *Personal Narrative*, 2:255–56. F. E. Peters adopts the language of Burton and Rutter in describing the "supercilious" respect given to the *aghāwāt* by the pilgrims; see *Jerusalem and Mecca*, p. 164.

291. Burton, *Personal Narrative*, 1:372. This negative portrait of the eunuchs' character contrasts sharply with their image in Arabic sources.

292. Wavell, *A Modern Pilgrim*, pp. 82–83. Wavell arrived in Madina shortly after the Banū ʿAlī had declared "a sort of holy war" against the Turks. The apparent cause of the conflict was the Hijaz railway. The Ottoman government, on completion of the railway, had cut off protection fees to the tribes which had traditionally exacted the *khūwwa* (brotherhood) payments in exchange for not plundering the pilgrimage caravans. The Banū ʿAlī, guardians of the route between Madina and the tomb of Hamza, the Prophet's uncle and one of the first battlefield martyrs of Islam, either killed two pilgrims to Hamza's tomb or allowed them to be killed by robbers, an incident that touched off a major confrontation with the Ottoman forces in Madina. See ibid., pp. 60–64.

293. Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 1:290.

294. Ibid., 2:187–89.

295. Léon Roches, *Trente-deux ans à travers l'Islam (1832–1864)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1885), 2:80. In the Ottoman period it was common for the "retired" *kızlarağası* to be given the position of chief eunuch of Madina.

296. Ibrāhīm Rifʿat Pasha, 1:451.

297. Ibrāhīm Rifʿat Pasha, 2:461, ill. 181; the caption reads: "Rasm namudhaj ithnayn min al-aghawāt bi'l-masjid al-nabawī [an illustration of the appearance of two of the aghas of the Prophet's mosque]."

298. Saleh Soubhy, *Le pèlerinage à la Mecque et à Médine* (Cairo, 1894), p. 83. Female circumcision was apparently a more acceptable subject to the European audience, since Doctor Soubhy adds an appendix on the subject. His arguments in defence of clitoridectomy are drawn not from traditional Egyptian Muslim (and Christian) practices but from the contemporary European medical theory of female hysteria. On the practice of clitoridectomy in late nineteenth-century Europe, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York, 1985), pp. 75–78.

299. Muḥammad Labīb Bey al-Batanūnī, *al-Riḥla al-ḥijāziyya* (Cairo, A.H. 1329), pp. 236–43. From the time of his accession in 1892, the young khedive, hoping to create a powerful anti-British coalition, had been seeking to bring the pan-Islamists into an uneasy alliance with the Egyptian National party and pro-Ottoman groups. He had made large financial donations to the nationalist newspapers of both the more secularist Muṣṭafa Kāmil and the strongly pro-Islamic Shaykh ʿAlī Yūsuf. By 1907, however, the khedive's relationship with Muṣṭafa Kāmil's National party, always problematic, had completely deteriorated, and he had thrown all his support behind the pro-Islamic (and pro-khedive) Constitutional Reform party of Shaykh ʿAlī Yūsuf. In 1909, the same year in which he made his pilgrimage, the khedive had proposed an Arab alliance, with himself as the new caliph. The intensely Islamic symbolism of his widely publicized pilgrimage and of his *khidma* (service) with the eunuchs in the Prophet's tomb would not have been lost on his pan-Islamist supporters. For a discussion of the khedive's political aspirations and his relations with the Egyptian nationalist movement and the pan-Islamists, see P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London, 1969), pp. 189–235. For a brief biography, see *EI* (2), s.v. "ʿAbbās Hilmī II."

300. Soubhy, *Pèlerinage*, p. 104.

301. Rutter, *Holy Cities*, 1:267.

302. Ibrāhīm Rifʿat Pasha, 1:260 and 2:460. Rutter estimated that some eight hundred individuals had been employed in one way or another in the *ḥaram* of Mecca and over a thousand in the *ḥaram* of the Prophet. See Rutter, *Holy Cities*, 2:238–39. These figures do not include the professional guides (known as *muṭawwifūn* in Mecca and *muzawwirūn* in Madina), the merchants, and the hotelkeepers in both cities whose livelihood also depended on the pilgrimage and the *ziyāra*.

303. Rutter, *Holy Cities*, 2:238, 2:236.

304. Ibid., 2:238–39.

305. Ibid., 2:240.

306. Ibid., 1:267. It would also have been contrary to Islamic law for the boys to be castrated within the Dār al-Islam—a provision that, with few exceptions, seems to have been observed.

307. Ibid., 1:267.

308. Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 1:290.

309. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz II's great-great grandfather Turkī, a paternal cousin of Saʿud ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, organized the restoration of the Wahhabi state in Najd after the death of Saʿud and the betrayal and execution of the latter's son ʿAbd Allah ibn Saʿud. For a detailed account of the first Wahhabi occupation of Madina, see al-Barzanjī, pp. 62–63.

310. Badia y Leiblich, *Travels of Ali Bey*, 2:157–59.

311. The elder al-Barzanjī, Ismāʿīl, had married the daughter of the Ottoman governor of Kurdistan, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Pasha, Jaʿfar's maternal grandfather. After almost half a century of exile, Ismāʿīl decided to return to his homeland (*waṭanihi*). He traveled first to Egypt—where he left Jaʿfar to spend a year of study at al-Azhar—and from Egypt went to Istanbul to seek the "porte of the great king and the glorious *khaqan*, the sultan of Islam and of the Muslims, the goal of the seekers and the hopeful." Apparently the trip was not made in vain, for when Ismāʿīl finally reentered Madina, with Jaʿfar and the rest of his family accompanying him, he returned to a highly privileged position and to the post of Shāfiʿi chief *muftī*, which Jaʿfar would later inherit. See al-Barzanjī, pp. 33–34, for Jaʿfar's account of these events.

312. Ḥusayn ʿAbd Allāh Baslamah, pp. 363–65.

313. Lady Evelyn Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca* (London, 1934), pp. 112–14.

314. As early as 1935 Baslamah mentions that electricity has replaced the eunuchs' lighting of lamps in the *ḥaram* of Mecca (p. 364).

315. Haidar, *Arabesque*, p. 231.

316. Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, p. 203.

317. Muḥammad ʿUmar Rāfiʿ, *Makka fī ʾl-qarn al-rābiʿ ʿashar al-hijrī* (Mecca, 1981), pp. 94–95.

318. Ibid.

319. Ibid.

320. Sālim Farīd, cited in an interview by Tawfīq Naṣr Allāh, *al-Yamāma*, February 7, 1990. I am grateful to William Young for bringing this article to my attention.

321. Ibid.

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